

# *Horizon*

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND ART

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ART IN AN ELECTRIC ATMOSPHERE

*by* HERBERT READ

EMINISCENCES OF VIRGINIA WOOLF

*by* T. S. ELIOT, ROSE MACAULAY,

V. SACKVILLE-WEST, AND WILLIAM PLOMER

COMRADES, BE GAY!

*by* PATRICK KIRWAN

WILDE AT OXFORD—II

*by* A. J. A. SYMONS

NOT SPAIN BUT HEMINGWAY

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## CONTENTS

	PAGE
COMMENT	303
THE SOLDIER	<i>Alun Lewis</i> 305
EPITHALAMIUM	<i>A. L. Rowse</i> 305
NIGHT FISHING	<i>Francis Scarfe</i> 306
ALDERSHOT	<i>John Waller</i> 307
OLD WELSH SONG	<i>Henry Treece</i> 307
ART IN AN ELECTRIC	
ATMOSPHERE	<i>Herbert Read</i> 308
NOTES ON VIRGINIA WOOLF	<i>T. S. Eliot</i> 313
	<i>Rose Macaulay</i> 316
	<i>V. Sackville-West</i> 318
	<i>William Plomer</i> 323
COMRADES, BE GAY!	<i>Patrick Kirwan</i> 328
WILDE AT OXFORD—II	<i>A. J. A. Symons</i> 336
THE EUSTON ROAD GROUP	<i>Sonia Brownell</i> 348
NOT SPAIN BUT HEMINGWAY	<i>Arturo Barea</i> 350
THE LESSON OF FRANCE	<i>Michael Roberts</i> 362
SELECTED NOTICE	<i>Alan Pryce-Jones</i> 366
REPRODUCTIONS:	

*There are reproductions of drawings by William Coldstream, Claude Rogers, Graham Bell and Victor Pasmore, and four photographs by Cecil Beaton following page 352.*

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# COMMENT

It is sad on a spring evening to walk through the bombed streets of Chelsea. There are vast districts of London—Bayswater, for example, or Kensington—which seem to have been created for destruction, where squares and terraces for half a century have invited dilapidation, where fear and hypocrisy have accumulated through interminable Sunday afternoons until, one feels (so evil is the atmosphere of unreality and suspense) that had it not been for the bombers, the houses would have been ignited one day of their own accord by spontaneous combustion. Behind the stucco porches and the lace curtains the half-life of decaying Victorian families guttered like marsh-gas. One has no pity for the fate of such houses, and no pity for the spectacular cinemas and fun-places of Leicester Square, whose architecture was a standing appeal to heaven to rain down vengeance on them. But Chelsea in the milky green evening light, where the church where Henry James was buried is a pile of red rubble, where tall eighteenth-century houses gaped with their insides blown out, like ruined triumphal arches, is a more tragic spectacle. For here the life that has vanished with the buildings that once housed it was of some consequence: there was some fine appreciation of books and pictures, and many calm hide-outs for the people who made them. It was one of the last strongholds of the cultivated *haute bourgeoisie* where leisure, however ill-earned, was seldom more agreeably and intelligently made use of. Now when the sun shines on these sandy ruins and on the brown and blue men working there one expects to see goats, and a goatherd in a burnous—*sirenes in delubris voluptatis*—pattering among them.

Meanwhile the bombs, which have emptied so many drawing rooms, have also been blasting the reputations made in them. Our literary values are rapidly changing. War shrinks everything. It means less time, less tolerance, less imagination, less curiosity, less play. We cannot read the leisurely wasteful masterpieces of the past without being irritated by the amount they take for granted. I have lately been reading both Joyce and Proust with considerable disappointment; they both seem to me very sick men, giant invalids who, in spite of enormous talent, were crippled by the same disease, elephantiasis of the ego. They both attempted titanic tasks,



and both failed for lack of that dull but healthy quality without which no masterpiece can be contrived, a sense of proportion. Proust, like Pope, hoaxed his contemporaries; he put himself over on them as a reasonable, intelligent, kind and sensitive human being, when his personality was in fact diseased and malignant, his nature pathologically cruel and vacillating, his values snobbish and artificial, his mind (like a growth which reproduces itself at the expense of the rest of the body) a riot of alternatives and variations, where the psychological horror of decision and fear of omission are masquerading as the love of truth.

For Joyce there seems almost less to be said; Proust's endless and repetitive soliloquies are at least the thoughts of an intelligent man, while those of Joyce reflect the vacuous mediocrity of his characters; both re-live the past to the point of exhaustion. Both are men of genius whose work is distorted by illness, by their respective struggles to see and to breathe, and both seem to us to have lacked all sense of social or political responsibility.

Yet we must remember that the life many of us are now leading is inimical to the appreciation of literature; we are living history, which means we are living from hand to mouth and reading innumerable editions of the evening paper. It is as unfair to judge art in these philistine conditions as if we were seasick. It is even more unfair to blame writers for their action or inaction in the years before the war, when we still tolerate in office nearly all the old beaming second-rate faces, with their indomitable will to power, and their self-sealing tanks of complacency.

*Horizon*, therefore, will present the case for these writers in forthcoming articles on *Proust* by R. Ironside, and on *Finnegan's Wake* by Frank Budgen, which will help those of us who are passing through a dark night of the æsthetic emotion to balance our opinions. *Horizon* will also gladly publish the best letter we receive on Barea's review of Hemingway in this number, for we feel that this most original article neglects the literary and dramatic qualities of the book, and Arthur Koestler, who was to have replied to it, is now in the Pioneer Corps.

ALUN LEWIS  
THE SOLDIER

I within me holding  
Turbulence and Time—  
Volcanic fires deep beneath the glacier—  
Feel the dark cancer in my vitals  
Of impotent impatience grope its way  
Through daze and dream to throat and fingers  
To find its climax of disaster.  
The sunlight breaks its glittering wings  
Imprisoned in the Hall of Mirrors;  
Nightmare rides upon the headlines;  
While Summer leaves her green reflective woods  
And flashes momentarily on peaks of madness.  
But leisurely my fellow soldiers stroll among the trees  
The cheapest dance song utters all they feel.

A. L. ROWSE  
EPITHALAMIUM

Behold them standing at the altar there,  
The candles clearly burning in the March air,  
The yellow spring-flowers in the chaste and bare  
Church, are bright in the eyes of the bridal pair;  
These two have chosen each other with equal heart  
In sickness and in health, till death do them part.  
The congregated women crane to see  
This act made sure before society  
For greater warrant of security  
From man to woman. Or rather say that she,  
Having won her woman's victory,  
Will fasten like a sea-anemone  
Upon him, the female instinct to enfold  
And wrap him round, nor ever loosen hold.

Or like those plants of so seductive smell  
 That delicately entice within their cell  
 Uncertain insects, frail and fluttering,  
 Whose petals shut upon the wounded wing,  
 Whose stamens search the heart and suck the brain,  
 Nor ever let their prisoners out again.  
 Or as that animal with honeyed tongue  
 Licks up the unwary, innocent and young;  
 Or spider that with hairy limbs confines  
 Lovingly his prey within fine lines,  
 Till the long forefinger strikes to paralyse  
 The willing victim, the fascinated eyes:  
 So too society, the octopus  
 Many-tentacled, lays wait for us,  
 Softly the inner core of man seeks out,  
 Pierces the flesh and slowly eats the heart.

## FRANCIS SCARFE

# NIGHT FISHING

Lightbuoys bob red on the sea  
 Through blue fog. Bell-stick tugs in the sand  
 Till taut line slipped through a cunning hand  
 Heaves a whiting to the bay.

Arm arcs, swings a whistling line  
 Dwindling the coil till the plunger's splash  
 Spurts spray like blood in the lighthouse flash  
 From the lip of the green Tyne.

Salt north-easter peels the beach,  
 Plaits flaxen tracery as it combs  
 Dunes to thin tresses. Curlew cries come  
 Craven from the sheer cliff ledge.

Moon gilds weeds on the split rock  
 Where once I sat in the wishing-chair  
 And yearned, Kathleen, for your golden hair:  
 Thoughts drift, and are lost, like wrack.



JOHN WALLER  
ALDERSHOT

Dark as if deep in Africa this town is lost  
Away from the bright lights and the jokers  
Persuading the hour to amuse. The quiet cafés  
Where hearts are intruded among tea cups,  
The stylish restaurant with waiters dancing like storks,  
All these with the shadows at elegant bars  
And the ladies in green at midnight parties  
Join hands to escape this town, shun the roar  
That is only echoing to the skies 'I forget, I forget.'  
Soldiers have made here a drear country  
Of barrack and ball-room, snack bar and square,  
And the public-houses with their tired or joyful faces  
Are signs of the disaster hitting us there.  
Now all the world's darlings and Mothers' heroes,  
The lonely, the lovely, the shy and the bold,  
Are made a machine or become hard hearted,  
So fearful of memory that evenings lend  
The power that preserves to a haunting end.

HENRY TREECE  
OLD WELSH SONG

I take with me where I go  
A pen and a golden bowl;  
Poet and beggar step in my shoes,  
Or a prince in a purple shawl.

I bring with me when I return  
To the house that my father's hands made,  
A crooning bird on a crystal bough,  
And O, a sad, sad word!

HERBERT READ

# ART IN AN ELECTRIC ATMOSPHERE

ON Thursday, April 17th, the morning after the great raid on London, I was compelled to walk from the Bank to Piccadilly. There were no buses running on that route, and the taxis crunched their way slowly and uncertainly over the glass-strewn streets. As I came near to St. Paul's I found all the approaches blocked. I had to turn and make my way across the Thames by Southwark Bridge. The warehouses and tenements on the south bank were desolate and unnaturally quiet. I recrossed the river by Blackfriars Bridge and found the Strand blocked. Another detour took me through the Covent Garden district, past burning ruins in Leicester Square, and so into Piccadilly, looking sultry under a smoke-screened sun.

There was plenty to think about on that long walk. I had passed the Bank of England, the Cathedral dedicated to St. Paul—better symbol of the Church of England than the gothic Abbey further up the river, the offices of *The Times*, and had ended up near Burlington House. But I did not think of these buildings and their symbolism, but of the inexplicable calm of the people I had seen, sweeping up the broken glass, removing their goods from their gaping shopfronts, directing hoses on to the smoking debris. If you have been in an accident, you are shaken: you generally stutter a bit and turn pale. These people, after a night of relentless bombing, were not even bad-tempered: they were just normally unnaturally normal. British phlegm? Cockney imperturbability? Or apathetic minds unable to measure the extent and significance of the disaster in which they were involved? I had no clear explanation, but as I crossed Blackfriars Bridge and looked at the long reach of the river, the ugly incoherent buildings thrusting their bleached façades into the haze, the slowly mounting columns of smoke, I realized that I too was unnaturally calm, one of the millions to whom the phrase 'going about his business' now meant 'picking his way among the ruins'.

But the ruins, I reflected, were not merely so much rubble and twisted steel. The endless and intricate structures of a civilization were falling down. It was not merely the jewellers' and furriers' shops, the workmen's tenements and the warehouses which I had passed: it was also the Bank of England and the Royal Academy, the Church of England and *The Times*. These institutions, too, were among the ruins, and if they survived at all, they would have to be rebuilt in a new style. And to be quite honest, many less conservative institutions were looking a bit shaken in that morning air—the Labour Party and the frustrated rump of the Communist Party, for example. And all the bright young art societies, so hopeful and experimental before the war—what had become of them? Some of them had found refuge in an underground shelter known as the Central Institute for Art and Design, a conglomeration of incongruous Royal Societies, groups and associations from which nothing could be expected but pious compromise and indiscriminate charity. Indeed, all institutions, institutes, associations and federations had become so many empty forms, structures with their windows blown out, their walls cracked, their reports and memoranda a heap of sodden ashes.

We shall rebuild, of course. Even if we are defeated we shall rebuild. In 1920 a defeated Germany was able to rebuild and a movement in the arts far more vital than anything that had existed before the war had been born. It was afterwards to be destroyed by the Nazis, but it was destroyed because it was not vital enough, not revolutionary enough. It compromised with its capitalist patrons, its bourgeois democrats and bureaucrats. The same situation in France. The Paris of the 'twenties, the Paris of Picasso and Stravinsky, had been vital enough. But its vitality was unrelated to a political philosophy, to any social integrity. Even the revolutionary writers still aspired to the laurels of the Académie Française, or to the entrée to some fashionable salon. Only the surrealists had any integrity, and they did their best not to be taken seriously.

The trouble with the last time, say our amateur militarists, was that Germany was not properly subjugated; she was defeated but not disintegrated. The implication is that we must not make that mistake again. But the trouble with the last time was also that we were not properly victorious. We muddled through to victory, and when November 1918 came, nothing was changed. The same



rotten system that had brought about the war staggered through the consequent mess on American stilts. Power remained in tainted hands: the politicians, here and in France, talked boogie-woogie to the public while behind the scenes the monopolists concentrated their power for another struggle. Militarists whose existence was threatened by disarmament, diplomats whose function might be reduced to insignificance by the League of Nations, kept the hate fires burning. And now the conflagration they have lit is blown back in their own faces. The flames are no longer metaphorical. They roar and crackle through the banks and building societies, through the offices of insurance companies and stockbrokers. The roofs fall and the debt rises. Finance is no longer a reality: it has become a fantasy in whose reality even economists no longer believe. The only realities are tanks and aeroplanes, ships and food, productive labour of all kinds.

Meanwhile artists and writers, the producers of culture, are gradually absorbed into the war machine. Seeing our weakening ranks, the philistines send up a shout of triumph. *The Times* celebrates 'the eclipse of the highbrow' and Lord Elton tells us that we should not have despised the unspectacular virtues—endurance, unselfishness and discipline. As in the last war, these reactionaries console themselves with the thought that communists and artists and the so-called *avant-garde* were a lot of stormy petrels announcing the storm that has now broken over us: that when the storm has passed there will be calm again, no noisy birds, a stable society and a classical art. They ignore the fact that the modern movement has its roots far back in the nineteenth century; that it is only modern in the sense that modern science is modern, or modern political theory. Modern art, in fact, is merely one expression of that principle of liberty which throughout history has been the only infallible index of vitality. What the last war did was to accelerate or intensify in the arts that restless spirit of experiment or adventure which was the prevalent spiritual condition of the time. I see no reason why the present war should affect the arts in any different way.

Unless our civilization is to disappear completely, the post-war period must in all spheres of human activity be not less but more dynamic than any previous period known to history. This is no age of easy transitions. Even Mr. Churchill, however unwilling to define the future, admits that if we emerge victorious from this

struggle for freedom and progress, there will be an 'electric atmosphere' in the world which will demand an enormously accelerated advance towards social unity and justice. He was addressing a luncheon party given jointly by the British Employers' Federation and the Trade Union Congress, and it is possible that his idea of what constitutes social unity and justice differed from the ideas of at least half of his audience. But about the nature of the situation in which we shall find ourselves at the end of the war there could be, in such a realistic assembly, no difference of opinion. War will give place to social revolution, to vast movements of spiritual revulsion and ardent, hopeful planning. The realists, among whom we can confidently place Mr. Churchill, know this, and their only headache is how to control, to their own ultimate interests, the frenzies that have been released from the ruins of capitalist economy. It sometimes seems that they realize that they will need the co-operation of the artist and the poet no less than of the practical man. But it is not for a moment to be supposed that the architects and the painters, the sculptors and the poets of the post-war period will meet the groaning gestation around them with the helpless conformist accents and moral banalities which *The Times* has been accustomed to interpose between its readers and reality. On the contrary, the art of the future will be more experimental and revolutionary than any we have known in the between-war years. It is precisely in this, its increased revolutionary tempo, that it *must* be different.

As for the 'common man', for whom *The Times* has recently shown such an unusual concern, he does not find a place in the society of the future—neither the common nor the uncommon man. While it is true enough that people differ in sensibility, intelligence and power of invention, I do not think that this is a difference that can be expressed as artist *v.* common man. Such terms as artist and layman, craftsman and amateur, seem to imply the continuance of a class society differentiated, not according to function, but according to taste, or wealth, or some equally irrelevant standard. But the society we contemplate, and to whose establishment we shall devote if necessary a positive phase of the war when the present negative phase (the war *against* fascism) is over, this new society will have no use for cultural *élites*, whether of Burlington House or Printing House Square. It will have no use for any 'culture' that does not spring spontaneously from the

progressive energy of the people, and from a people not debased by financial slavery and social subserviency, but a people confident and manly, and above all creative. That the art of such a people will differ radically from the academic art of the past twenty years is not to be denied; but it will not tend to mildness, to moderation, or even to simplicity, that last infirmity of lazy minds. The great art of the past—the art of Æschylus, of Dante, of Shakespeare, of Milton, of Beethoven—was not simple<sup>1</sup> in the sense implied by those who complain of the obscurity and perversity of modern art; it was the art of epochs as complex as our own, and it has its relevant artistic complexity, which still baffles the elucidatory efforts of scholars and commentators. The art of the post-war period will be no less complex, or it will fail to represent the period and to appeal to the deepest instincts of the people of the period.

‘Culture’ may be easy: it can be obtained in a pre-digested form from guide books and history books, from manuals and polite essays. It can be worn like a suit from Sackville Street or cultivated like an Oxford accent. But art is difficult, just because it is creative and original—the tight apex of the unfolding bud of human consciousness. There will be lazy people in the future, just as there have been lazy people in the past, who will not make the necessary effort to sharpen their sensibilities against the astringent light; but in the future, let us hope, there will be less of them. Because on the effort to understand art depends the effort to understand life, to understand the principle of liberty which makes life, and which makes human progress.

If I am asked what the art of the post-war period will be like, I become as vague as Mr. Churchill. I can only reply that it will be an expression of the society we then establish. If we go back to the government of the Bank of England and the City, to preposterous monopolies exploiting the essentials of life, to a parliament of fools and an underworld of crime, then we shall go back to an art of convention, sentimentality and pride against which a few revolutionary protests will be more vain and ineffective than ever. But if we discard the notions of victory and defeat, if through common suffering we are driven to humility and good will, then

<sup>1</sup> When Milton wrote that poetry should be *more* simple, sensuous and passionate *than rhetoric*, he did not imply that poetry should necessarily be easy, placid and platitudinous.



reason may prevail in human affairs and we shall build up from the ruins a society free from all the grotesque and irrational institutions of finance, snobbery and greed. The art which will then arise as a spontaneous expression of the spiritual life of such a society will bear no obvious relation to any art that exists now. It will incorporate, for those who have eyes to see beneath the surfaces, the eternal harmonies of all great art; but it will be so original in its outward manifestations that its first impact must inevitably seem, and be, revolutionary. But in so far as we shall then all be revolutionaries, and art as we know it now will have disappeared in the flames like so much dusty plush, what might be called revolutionary in the language of to-day will then be simply creative.

## VIRGINIA WOOLF

I—T. S. ELIOT

It has only been under peculiar conditions that I have ever been able to interest myself in criticizing—except in the currents of conversation—contemporary writers. In the case of authors whose work one considers pernicious, or whose work has been treated with an uncritical adulation which is pernicious, one figures to oneself occasionally an obligation to denounce or ridicule. In the case of authors whose merits have been ignored or misunderstood there is sometimes a particular obligation of championship. But when an author of unquestionable importance has received due tribute, and is not in the slightest danger of being overlooked or belittled, there is no compulsion to criticize: what chiefly matters is that his writing should be *read*. As soon as one generation has been succeeded by another, the endless labour of revaluations which will be in turn revalued must begin. It is not at the moment when a particular author dies that this work begins, but when a whole generation is gone.

There must, however, be some right point of reference for the moment of death, other than that of the formal obituary which is at best an attempt to say too much in too little space. It seems to me that when a great writer dies—unless he has already long

outlived his life—something is in danger of vanishing which is not to reappear in the critical study, the full-length biography, or the anecdotal reminiscences. Perhaps it is something that cannot be preserved or conveyed: but at least we can try to set down some symbols which will serve to remind us in future that there is something lost, if we cannot remember what; and to remind a later generation that there is something they do not know, in spite of all their documents, even if we cannot tell them what. It is something which Virginia Woolf, with all her craft and genius, failed to convey in her life of Roger Fry: and if she failed who, if anyone, should have been successful with a lesser figure, I doubt whether we can do much about her, however we try. It is what someone I forget who, must have meant when he wandered about saying simply: 'Coleridge is dead.' I mean that it is neither regret that an author's work has come to an end nor desolation at the loss of a friend, for the former emotion can be expressed, and the latter one keeps to oneself; but the loss of something both more profound and more extensive, a change to the world which is also a damage to oneself.

While this feeling cannot be communicated, the external situation can to some extent be outlined. Any dead author of long ago, an author on whom we feel some peculiarly personal dependence, we know primarily through his work—as he would wish to be known by posterity, for that is what he cared about. But we may also search and snatch eagerly at any anecdote of private life which may give us the feeling for a moment of seeing him as his contemporaries saw him. We may try to put the two together, peering through the obscurity of time for the unity which was both—and coherently—the mind in the masterpiece and the man of daily business, pleasure and anxiety as ourselves: but failing this, we often relapse into stressing the differences between the two pictures. No one can be understood: but between a great artist of the past and a contemporary whom one has known as a friend there is the difference between a mystery which baffles and a mystery which is accepted. We cannot explain, but we accept and in a way understand. It is this, I think, that disappears completely.

The future will arrive at a permanent estimate of the place of Virginia Woolf's novels in the history of English literature, and it will also be furnished with enough documents to understand what

her work meant to her contemporaries. It will also, through letters and memoirs, have more than fugitive glimpses of her personality. Certainly, without her eminence as a writer, and her eminence as the particular kind of writer she was, she would not have occupied the personal position she held among contemporaries; but she would not have held it by being a writer alone—in the latter case it would only be the cessation of work which would here give cause for lament. By attempting to enumerate the qualities and conditions which contributed, one may give at first a false impression of ‘accidental advantages’ concurring to reinforce the imaginative genius and the sense of style which cannot be contested, to turn her into the symbol, almost myth, which she became for those who did not know her, and the social centre which she was for those who did. Some of these advantages may have helped to smooth the path to fame—though when a literary reputation is once established, people quickly forget how long it was in growing—but that fame itself is solidly enough built upon the writings. And these qualities of personal charm and distinction, of kindness and wit, of curiosity about human beings, and the particular advantage of a kind of hereditary position in English letters (with the incidental benefits which that position bestowed) do not, when enumerated, tell the whole story: they combined to form a whole which is more than the sum of the parts.

I am well aware that the literary-social importance which Virginia Woolf enjoyed, had its nucleus in a society which those people whose ideas about it were vague—vague even in connection with the topography of London—were wont, not always disinterestedly perhaps, to deride. The sufficient answer *ad hoc*—though not the final answer—would probably be that it was the only one there was: and as I believe that without Virginia Woolf at the centre of it, it would have remained formless or marginal, to call attention to its interest to the sociologist is not irrelevant to my subject. Any group will appear more uniform, and probably more intolerant and exclusive from the outside than it really is; and here, certainly, no subscription of orthodoxy was imposed. Had it, indeed, been a matter of limited membership and exclusive doctrine, it would not have attracted the exasperated attention of those who objected to it on these supposed grounds. It is no part of my purpose here either to defend, criticize or appraise *élites*; I only mention the matter in order to make the point that Virginia



Woolf was the centre, not merely of an esoteric group, but of the literary life of London. Her position was due to a concurrence of qualities and circumstances which never happened before, and which I do not think will ever happen again. It maintained the dignified and admirable tradition of Victorian upper middle-class culture—a situation in which the artist was neither the servant of the exalted patron, the parasite of the plutocrat, nor the entertainer of the mob—a situation in which the producer and the consumer of art were on an equal footing, and that neither the highest nor the lowest. With the death of Virginia Woolf, a whole pattern of culture is broken: she may be, from one point of view, only the symbol of it; but she would not be the symbol if she had not been, more than anyone in her time, the maintainer of it. Her work will remain; something of her personality will be recorded: but how can her position in the life of her own time be understood by those to whom her time will be so remote that they will not even know how far they fail to understand it? As for us—*l'on sait ce que l'on perd. On ne sait jamais ce que l'on rattrapera.*

## II—ROSE MACAULAY

'SHE had animation; she had sensibility; she had elegance, beauty and wit.' Thus Jane Austen, doing her descriptive utmost, might have approved Virginia Woolf. And between the animation, the sensibility, the elegance, the beauty and the wit, the essential quality would have slyly slipped, to look out mockingly from the turn of a phrase in talk, a sudden chuckle, a ridiculous question, a flashing piece of analysis or flight.

What made Virginia Woolf the most enchanting company in the world? Animation? There are plenty of animated talkers. Sensibility? There are many sensitive receivers. Zest? Again plenty of that. Sympathy? Imagination? Wit? Irony? Culture? Brain? One hesitates to say that there are ever plenty of these; but they are not infrequently to be met. Yet they somehow combined in Virginia Woolf to make a person so rare and so delightful that she is not to be met elsewhere at all, so that getting her 'Come and see me' on a postcard was like being sent a free ticket to some stimulating entertainment.

With her, conversation was a flashing, many-faceted stream now running swiftly, now slowing into still pools that shimmered

with a hundred changing lights, shades and reflections, wherein sudden coloured fishes continually darted and stirred, now flowing between deep banks, now chuckling over sharp pebbles. She was sometimes pleased ironically to pose as the recluse who watched life from a quiet, drab corner, inviting her friends to tell her their fine stories of the world, of the rich parties they had doubtless attended, of the whirl of society from which they had just stepped, into which they would, she assured them, step again on leaving her. 'I think of you,' she would tell an unsociable visitor, 'as going from party to party, spinning round in the social whirl, leading a gay, rich, worldly life. Now tell me what is happening in the beau-monde.' The visitor, particularly if young or hero-worshipping, had perhaps hoped for a deep, cultured kind of conversation, about books, about art, about life, about Proust. He sometimes, but not always, got it. Had he (or she) written a book, he might, if lucky, get a verbal review of it, an analysis, appreciation and criticism that was worth more than any printed review. All this public reviewing by authors of one another's books, Virginia regarded as a mistake; she thought that little worth saying was said that way; her notion was that newspaper reviews should only be of the dead; living writers, she said, would do better to review each other by word of mouth and to each other's faces, charging (since authors must live) a fee for doing so. (The scheme, I believe, never achieved a financial basis.)

How recapture or convey talk? That throaty, deepish, wholly attractive voice, throwing out some irrelevant and negligent enquiry, starting some hare—'Is this a great age?' or, 'can there be Grand Old Women of literature, or only Grand Old Men? I think I shall prepare to be the Grand Old Woman of English letters. Or would you like to be?' Or, 'All this rubbish about Bloomsbury. . . . I don't feel Bloomsbury; do you feel Marylebone (or Chelsea, Kensington or Hampstead)?' Comments on people—'One of my geese. Geese usually like me; I have quite a flock; there must be something goosey about me, I'm afraid.' Her ironic, amused slant on clever young writers, 'the smarties'; on a vehement, black-browed talker, 'What charcoal fumes he emits!' on adolescent University communists, 'they have no culture, only politics. Quite different from us, who had no politics, only culture'. Her interest in scandal: 'Go on; this is enthralling. People keep telling me different bits of this story; I feel as if a buried

statue were being dug up piece by piece.' Her appreciation of people, in all their comic and delightful absurdities, their motley coats, the beauty and grace of the young, the learning of the learned, the wit of the brilliant, the simplicities of the simple. Such appreciation, such flattering discernment and interest, were heady fumes to intoxicate newcomers, evoking in them too often more of response, than was convenient or required.

To tell her anything was like launching a ship on the shifting waters of a river, which flashed back a hundred reflections, enlarging, beautifying, animating, rippling about the keel, filling the sails, bobbing the craft up and down on dancing waves, enlarging the small trip into some fantastic Odyssean voyage among islands of exotic flowers and amusing beasts and men.

Did anyone ever have a dull moment in her company? Did she ever have a dull moment herself? Tragic, yes, since she had imagination, sensibility, and fine-drawn nerves: but dull? Improbable, since life gave her what it did, and she gave what she did to life. Her mischievousness, her firm, gay and determined prejudices, her shaping and creating genius, her haunted and haunting imagination, her sensitiveness, her humour, her scholarly love and knowledge of the past, the fastidiously exquisite and many-coloured form in which she clothed her thought, made her mind a rich kingdom to herself, an excitement to her friends, her writing a spell to bind her readers.

Yes, 'she had animation, she had sensibility, she had elegance, beauty and wit'; and behind all these a rare and fine-spun greatness. Her going seems symbolic of the end of an age. Was it, as she enquired, a great age? Possibly not. But it was, anyhow, an age in which such as she could live and breathe; and it may likely enough be the last of these for a long time.

### III—V. SACKVILLE - WEST

DEAR ELIZABETH,

I feel sure that you must share my irritation at the labels so persistently tied on to Virginia. Arnold Bennett, I believe, was one of the first culprits: 'Queen of Bloomsbury', 'Queen of the Highbrows', and so on. It is thus in anger that I take a pen to protest against so rigid a pigeon-holing of so fluid a personality.



For the term highbrow is not usually applied in any complimentary sense. It is not intended to define a rightly fastidious taste, but rather to suggest a limited, carping attitude of mind; a mutual-admiration society peculiar to a closed set; a languid outlook from which a warmer humanity is excluded. Recently it has given much satisfaction to many worthy people to read about the Eclipse of the Highbrow, whatever that may mean; but certainly the only time I ever thought of Virginia as being eclipsed was when the sun himself shared her darkening, and I saw her standing wraith-like on a Yorkshire moor while the shadow swept onwards towards totality.

No, the wielders of rough judgment like Arnold Bennett and the readers of the correspondence in *The Times* would be better advised to differentiate between highbrow and highbrow. It is the fake highbrow who has given the bad name to the genuine. I need hardly remark to you that Virginia was genuine all through. Any suggestion of pose (a crude and ill-considered word to throw at anybody, anyway) becomes ludicrous in association with a person so very much all of a piece. It was not even necessary to know her intimately to realize that she could not be otherwise than she was. One needed only to receive a postcard arranging or confirming an appointment to see that here was a mind with a twist of its own; always some quip or some unexpected phrase. I dare say you may remember the publication, many years ago, of a book called *The Bromide Book*. It is out of print and out of memory now, but it should be revived (perhaps as a Penguin or as one of the new Guild Books) as a salutary corrective for all those people who accept their opinions at second hand. The classification lay between Bromides and Sulphides: the dull bodies and the live wires. One applied the test to one's acquaintances and friends, and found that they responded to the test as readily as an electric battery responds to the touch of positive or negative. There was no half-way house. Virginia, even on the briefest postcard, was sulphidic. She was always herself; never anybody else at second hand.

Margot Oxford (herself a Sulphide) made one pertinent remark in the note which she contributed to *The Times*. 'What was curious about Virginia,' she wrote, 'was that her handwriting, countenance, and conversation were inseparably the same; equally

sensitive and equally distinguished.' That is very true; and distinguished is, of course, one of the adjectives which can hardly be kept out of any comment. A little crowd of them comes trooping along: distinguished, fastidious—they all belong to the same family. There was a unity about her whole personality which instantly proposed such definitions. It is not going too far to suggest that her very name seemed made for her: Virginia Woolf. She could not have been better called, and was fortunate both as a baby at the font and in her marriage. Tenuousness and purity were in her baptismal name, and a hint of the fang in the other.

But it is not on these aspects of our uncommon friend that I intended to dwell. They could all be amplified by any intelligent reader. What I wished to recall to you who knew her, and to indicate if possible for those who knew of her only as a public character, was the enormous sense of fun she had (her own brand, certainly, as everything about her was her own brand), and the rollicking enjoyment she got out of easy things.

I don't know whether you will agree with this. Perhaps you will condemn this interpretation as shallow and will reply that for you she remains veiled in the slight romantic haze which surrounds her nature deepened by thoughtfulness and melancholy. It would be a falsity to deny this element in anyone who wrote the books she wrote, and you may go further and tell me that your impression is increased by the recollection of the hours one spent with her sitting in the half-light she loved, when her moving hands became shadowy and the teasing note left her voice and her features became visible only when she bent forward to poke the fire. Twilight and firelight were her own illumination; I will give you that. But at least you will agree that mental excitement was always the keynote. In the adventures of the mind she was a tireless treasure-seeker, whether she turned out the contents of her own imagination as an Elizabethan lumber-chest or corkscrewed into the recesses of one's own disposition. (What a knack she had for doing that! A common criticism of her novels was that she 'could not portray human beings', and indeed she could also weave fabulous tapestries out of her peculiar vision of her friends but at the same time I always thought her genius led her by short-cuts to some essential point which everybody else had missed. She did not walk there: she sprang.)

If you will concede that mental excitement was a keynote

her life, with all its implications and in all its forms, simple and complicated, so far removed from the popular conception of the languid destructive highbrow, you will agree also that she lived permanently like a poet on the plane where he finds himself enabled to produce poetry. An all-too-rare and infrequent state of mind, as any poet will tell you. But Virginia seemed able to sustain it in daily life. Technically speaking, she chose prose as her medium, not poetry; but that, surely, was by chance; a novel such as *The Waves* is pure poetry save for the fact that it happens to be written in prose. (Sir Thomas Browne figures here, I think, for she had a great dash of the seventeenth century in her.) Moreover, as she probably told you often, the idea of writing poetry did tempt her; the idea of combining poetry and fiction always allured her; and a careful reader may discover a buried versification of an unorthodox sort in at least one of her published works.

But this letter to you was not intended to turn into a critical essay on her works or her future intentions. It was intended to be a personal letter from one friend to another. Yet there is one thing I cannot refrain from asking you: Did the analogy between Virginia and Coleridge ever strike you? Did it ever occur to you that Virginia, translated into another century, might have written *Kubla Khan*, the *Ancient Mariner*, and the *Bibliographia literaria*? She and Coleridge both seem to me to combine the unusually mixed ingredients of genius and intellect, the wild, fantastic, intuitive genius on the one hand, and the cold, reasoning intellect on the other. One difference between them was that Coleridge depended largely on the stimulation of opium for the exercise of his poetical genius. Virginia depended only on the stimulation which her own mind supplied. She was very temperate in her outward life. She liked wine, but drank it seldom; she liked it chiefly for its romantic quality, for its colour held up to the light; and for the heightening she so infrequently allowed it to give to her sensibilities.

She used to come and stay with me in an old cottage where the beams were already on the slant. I would give her a glass of Spanish wine the colour of red amber, and she would pretend that the beams went even more crooked after she had drunk it. It fitted in with her imagination to see things aslant rather than dully straight.

This was getting her away from her own background, the background of London and what is called Bloomsbury; from the



background, even, of Monk's House and the life that really fed her roots. So, finally, I come round to the Virginia I wanted to write to you about, the Virginia with whom I went alone to France.

She loved travelling. She was as excited as a schoolgirl on arriving in Paris. We went out after dinner and found a bookseller's shop open, and she perched on a stool and talked to the bookseller about Proust. Next day we went south to Burgundy. There she forgot all about Proust in the simple enjoyment of the things we found. A fair in a French village, roundabouts, shooting galleries, lions and gipsies giving a performance together, stalls with things to buy; all was sheer fun. We bought knives and green corduroy coats with buttons representing hares, pheasants, partridges. They were said to be gamekeepers' coats, but Virginia preferred to think that they were poachers'. The poacher would naturally be dearer to her mind than the keeper.

Then we went on from the village to the little towns, Avallon, Auxerre, and found the cathedral with its stained glass or the curiosity shop with its junk, and she discovered something in both. I never knew which she preferred. I think they each satisfied some demand in her mind, the kaleidoscopic beauty of the stained glass with its night-blues and yellows and reds, and the muddle of the junk shop where one might find a dressing-table or a 'Semaine Sainte' exquisitely leather-bound with the arms of Philippe d'Orléans for a few francs.

Then we went on to Vezelay and stayed there. You know about Vezelay; Pater wrote about it. He is too wordy, as usual, too elaborately wordy; but when he calls Vezelay 'this iron place' and describes its church as 'a long massive chest there, heavy about you', he comes somewhere near to a true picture. In this iron place we stayed, hanging above the vineyards and the valley of the Cure. Virginia liked sitting among the vines or going for walks among the unfamiliar French lanes, but what I remember most vividly is one night when a superb thunderstorm broke over Vezelay and we sat in darkness while the flashes intermittently lit up her face. She was, I think, a little frightened, and perhaps that drove her to speak, with a deeper seriousness than I had ever heard her speak before, of immortality and personal survival after death.

One note I will add to show once more how human she was. Her French wasn't good, although she could read it easily and had

walked round and round Tavistock Square, practising aloud the conversation she was learning by gramophone records. In France with me she had refused to utter a word, and the only phrase I ever heard came to my ears when it wasn't meant to. It was on the boat as we put out from Dieppe to Newhaven. Rather apprehensively she had approached a sailor. 'Est ce que la mer est brusque?'

Well . . . I seem to have put very little into this letter, probably because there was too much to say. But if I have corrected any misapprehensions (not in your mind, for I am certain they did not exist there), I shall feel rewarded.

Yours ever,

V. SACKVILLE-WEST

#### IV—WILLIAM PLOMER

ONCE when Virginia Woolf was sitting beside Lady Ottoline Morrell on a sofa their two profiles were suddenly to be seen, one in relief against the other, like two profiles on a Renaissance medal or coin—two strange queens who had come from the leisured, ceremonious nineteenth century, each, by being herself, to win an allegiance to herself in the twentieth. Both faces were aristocratic, but in that chance propinquity it was startling how much more finely bred, or shall we say delicate, Virginia's face appeared. The two women admired and were affectionate towards one another. They had a good deal in common. Both had what old-fashioned people call *presence*—great dignity and style, yet great simplicity. Ottoline Morrell, though not always discriminating about people, certainly understood the uniqueness of Virginia. Virginia spoke admiringly of the intelligence and force of character which had enabled Ottoline to emerge from the grand but narrow world into which she was born (and of which she retained the grandeur) into a more varied world in which ideas and talent counted more than property or background.

Both had an insatiable curiosity about their fellow-creatures, and both the love of gossip (in no disparaging sense of the word) and the capacity to be amused or astonished which goes with that virtue. In the exercise of this curiosity the difference in their

approach was as striking as the difference in their profiles. Ottoline would ask the most personal leading questions, not in a hectoring way, but without the slightest compunction, and with the manner of a feudal grandee who had a right to be told what she wanted to know. (Since most people like talking about themselves to a sympathetic listener she often got what she wanted.) Virginia's approach was less blunt and more ingenious. With a delicious and playful inventiveness she would often improvise an ironical fantasy about the life and habits of the person to whom she was talking, and this was likely to call forth protests, denials and explanations which helped to make up a confession. Ottoline, less vulnerable and less discerning, could get on with Tom, Dick and Harry, while Virginia sometimes frightened people by aloofness or asperity, for which they had only their own clumsiness to blame; but in the course of several hours of the company of any individual who, she afterwards admitted, caused her alternate emotions of anger, laughter, and utter boredom, she showed no sign of the first two and only a faint trace of the last—which is in any case the most difficult of the three to hide.

The fact that she did not make, either in social life or in her books, any concession to vulgarities, or offer any foothold to a banal understanding, or bait any traps for popularity, probably helped to create a legend about herself among the uninformed which still exists—a legend of a precious, fragile and superior highbrow shut up in an ivory tower in Bloomsbury and completely out of touch with 'ordinary' or 'normal' people (whoever they may be). The legend is quite false and hardly worth refuting; in any case Bloomsbury, as a term of abuse, had its origin in envy and ignorance, was almost meaningless, and is by now trite and pointless. If Virginia lived in an ivory tower, it consisted mostly of windows and was very hospitable, and she was as often out as in. Her life was rich in experience of people and places, and her disposition, as is sometimes the case with those who are highly strung and have an inclination to melancholy, was genial. A biographer, so far from having to chronicle the life of a recluse might be embarrassed by the richness of his material. Think, for instance, of Virginia as a young girl, anything but assured, going in a cab to a ball at a great house, wearing a modest string of pearls ('but they were *real* pearls'); Virginia learning Greek with Clara Pater, the sister of Walter, in Canning Place, in a setting



of blue china, Persian cats, and Morris wallpapers; the Dreadnought Hoax, one of the world's great practical jokes; Virginia bathing with the slightly bow-legged Rupert Brooke; Virginia sitting up all night in a Balkan hotel reading the *Christian Science Monitor* to cheat the bugs; the murder under her window in Euboea; Virginia continuing to play bowls at Rodmell during the Battle of Britain, with Spitfires and Messerschmitts fighting, swooping and crashing round her.

In each of us there are two beings, one solitary and one social, but no more separate than a man from his shadow, which goes with him everywhere, sometimes throws him into relief, disappears altogether in twilight, darkness or an even radiance, and grows immensely long towards sunset. There are people who cannot bear to be with others, and turn into hermits or something worse; most cannot bear to be alone, and so become common and shallow. In Virginia the two beings had an equal life and so made her a complete person. She could be detached and see things in perspective; and she could enter into things, into other people's lives, until she became part of them. The two beings can be perceived in her writings, sometimes distinct, sometimes merged. The special genius of her rare and solitary spirit reached its purest expression in *The Waves*, an exquisite, subjective book nearer to poetry and music than the novel. The social being in Virginia, the novelist, can be seen most essentially not in her fiction but in *The Common Reader*. Those essays are full of warmth, shrewdness, knowledge of the world and of human nature, qualities which, though discernible in her novels, are less important there than her own sensitivity, as an instrument, to the vibrations of the external world.

The old masters of fiction (Shakespeare, Balzac, Tolstoi) are such because, in addition to all the other necessary gifts, they are tough guys and men of the world with an exceptional robustness and gusto; they have also an extreme preoccupation with sociology. This preoccupation, when it goes more with finesse than with animal spirits, produces novelists like Jane Austen, Flaubert or Proust, and it was to such writers that Virginia Woolf was in some ways akin. It might be argued that her myth-making faculty was chiefly applied to sensations rather than to characters, and that her passion for sociology was in a sense scientific. Although she enjoyed embroidering facts about people in a poetic

or ironical way, she was really devoted to the facts themselves. The solitary being was a poet, the social being was a sort of scientist. The former discovered poetic truth, the latter anthropological truth. During the last ten years of her life Virginia said over and over again how much more she enjoyed reading autobiographies than novels. She was heard to say that almost any autobiography was more satisfying than a novel. When autobiographies were written by people she knew and who were congenial to her—Lady Oxford, for instance, and the bluff and breezy Dame Ethel Smyth—she not only had the pleasure of getting to know them better, but her appetite for social knowledge and reminiscence was very much gratified. A passionate precision in collecting data about society (very strong in Flaubert and Proust) made her delight in anything that helped it. Thus when a friend of Virginia's revealed a faculty for telling character from handwriting, she was much pleased and amused by his revelations, which, though not infallible, were occasionally penetrating. And sometimes she would make the joyful discovery that A most unexpectedly knew B. How? Why? Where? What was the link between them?

The artist is engaged in a constant effort to create order out of the haphazard, singleness out of multiplicity, to trace a pattern that can be seen in the universal pattern of life, which is too vast and various to comprehend. Virginia's extraordinary consciousness of the complexity of things and her ability to come to terms with that complexity made her value people who could do likewise, and if there was one thing more than another which her friends had in common it was their power of being articulate, like herself, in a new way. It was therefore not surprising to see her, one time and another in that upper room in Tavistock Square, happy in the company of, for example, Lytton Strachey, Lowell Dickinson, Roger Fry, E. M. Forster, T. S. Eliot, Stephen Spender, Elizabeth Bowen, or Rosamond Lehmann. She had a great gift for making the young and obscure feel that they were of value to her; she admired physical as well as intellectual beauty; she could charm away diffidence; and she could be notably sympathetic with young women, particularly young women from Cambridge. Her strong sense of the proper functions of literature and the importance of taste gave her a proper pride (derived doubtless in part from her literary father and background) in her own gifts, but she

was absolutely without arrogance, and no beautiful woman ever wore her beauty more modestly. Though her nervous vitality was much greater than her bodily strength, Virginia was a hard worker, not only at reading and writing, but as a publisher, and at times a printer, with her husband. She read a vast number of MSS. for the Hogarth Press, books from which rightly bore the imprint of 'Leonard and Virginia Woolf'. No writer, known or unknown, could have wished for a more imaginative and percipient publisher's reader, or one with more openness to new ideas. She was generous in her encouragement of younger writers, and was never, like those old fogeys who have lately been 'hunting the highbrow' in *The Times*, impeded by middle-aged prejudices. Indeed, one never thought of her in terms of age, but only of quality. This rare creature, simply by being herself, had won an international reputation, and in the Far East, as well as in Europe and America, she has evoked a response in the responsive. Those who have known Leonard and Virginia Woolf have known civilization, and one person at least has often, seeing them together, been reminded of that line of Crabbe's about happy marriages: 'They are not frequent, but they may be found.'

To write a few memorial pages about Virginia is an honour, a grief, and a pleasure: a pleasure, because it has always been and must always be pleasing to think of her. To write about her briefly is to be inadequate: she was many-sided, and many would have to write about her to bring her to life at all on paper. She loved the great abstractions, like truth and justice; she loved London and the country, her relations and friends; she loved her domestic surroundings; she loved the written word. She liked good talk, good food (and plenty of salt with it), and good coffee. I see her in a shady hat and summer sleeves, moving between the big tree and the zinnias at Rodmell; I see her sitting over a fire and smoking one of her favourite cheroots; I see the nervous shoulders, the creative wrists, the unprecedented sculpture of the temples and eye-sockets; I see her grave and stately, or in a paroxysm of happy laughter; and I shall never see her again.

The next *Horizon* will conclude this tribute to Virginia Woolf with notes by Duncan Grant and Sir Hugh Walpole, and an essay on 'The Common Reader', by Martin Turnell.



## PATRICK KIRWAN

# COMRADES, BE GAY!

'COMRADES,' said Fenja Modjeska earnestly, 'our Plan has succeeded beyond all expectation. The success of our Soviet industry is assured beyond all doubt. There is, therefore, no longer any need for us to be sad. Let us be Gay!'

Fenja Modjeska was a fierce little woman with a hawk-like nose and black flashing eyes. As they glittered brilliantly at the assembled members of the factory committee, they made several of the men—especially the ones to whom she had been married—feel far from gay. Above all was this the case with Piotr Grakin, whom Fenja Modjeska (in accordance with the newly adopted party policy aiming at the re-establishment of family life) had chosen to settle down with as her permanent husband.

She raised her hard little fist high above her head and brought it down on the table with a thump. 'Comrades,' she repeated in a shrill voice, 'let us be gay!'

There was silence for a moment; and the members of the factory committee eyed each other with some embarrassment.

Piotr Grakin thought to himself: 'It is all very well for Fenja to say that; that is quite an easy thing for anyone to say. On the other hand it is extremely difficult to be gay unless one feels gay, for that, as everyone knows, is purely a question of glandular secretions whose true functions our proletarian scientists have not yet discovered.' However, at this moment his mild blue eye caught the bright beam of Fenja's dark one; and he screwed up his Russian button of a nose and showed his white teeth through his pale lips in a panic-stricken attempt at a smile.

Fenja Modjeska pursued her thesis with true Marxian logic. She proved dialectically that the old tradition of Russian melancholy had its being in the corrupt and inefficient economic system of the Tsarist tyranny. She demonstrated that a proletarian economy (freed from the inevitable crises to which capitalism is subject) must necessarily lead to an increase in proletarian gaiety. She wound up with a stirring peroration and cried defiantly: 'What would be untrue to our communist faith were we to let our proletarian high spirits lag behind our collectivized production. Let

us greet the new life with a smile. Comrades, be Gay!' And she broke into a high-pitched cackle of a laugh that struck horror into the soul of Piotr Grakin.

Comrade Piotr was not a merry man. He was not really a worker at all, despite the fact that he was a shock-brigadier in the Bolshoi Tractor-factory. By this I do not wish to impute for a moment that he was of bourgeois origin; but that he was at heart a poet. He had written many poems, most of them dealing with the tears of things and the manifold sorrows of mankind.

Yet, as a good communist, he looked upon the making of verse as an uneconomic individualistic activity in a period of collectivist reconstruction; and so, at Fenja Modjeska's bidding, he had entered the factory as an unskilled worker. By dint of melancholy application to his task he had risen to be a fitter, ruining only three machines in the course of his progress. It was because of this that he had been made a shock-brigadier.

He listened to the buzz of excited chatter as the committee discussed Fenja Modjeska's resolution. Most of them now were in agreement with her. One grizzled old party-member recalled a joke that Lenin had made, whilst another—a notable scholar—recalled that Karl Marx himself had been known to get a little tipsy and climb lamp-posts to beguile the tedium of his exile in bourgeois London.

There was only one dissentient: Grigor Grigorovitch, a tectotal fanatic suspected of religious deviations; but he was a fellow who had only joined the party because in the first flush of revolution it had prohibited the sale of vodka. Indeed, it was hinted that he would have joined some other party when Comrade Rykov abolished the ban on intoxicants—had there been any other party to join.

None paid any heed to him, so he slunk into a corner, where he wailed loudly from time to time: 'I am a voice crying in the wilderness!'

At a meeting of the sub-committee it was decided to apply for an issue of stiff collars and Western European clothing for the men; and a number of the new smart three-piece outfits for the women, whose design had been officially approved, and which were suitable for either factory, theatre, park or promenade.

The women were better pleased than the men. They flaunted themselves gaily, and one of them created a sensation by appearing

with rouged lips and powdered cheeks. This brought on her a scathing paragraph and a caricature in the factory wall-newspaper; but in a spare corner of the same organ she wrote a spirited defence of herself, saying that the cosmetics in question had been brought her from America by her cousin, a good communist now revisiting the land of his birth, who maintained there was nothing in the philosophies of Lenin, Marx or Dietzgen forbidding good party-members to repair defects in nature.

The men grumbled at having to lay aside their comfortable blouses and clamp themselves into the stiff collars; but a few weeks later, when a supply of brightly hued hammer-and-sickle neckties were on sale in the Co-operative, they were forced to admit that the fashion indeed was smarter and more symbolic of efficiency.

Fenja Modjeska bought an old phonograph with a battered brass trumpet. She also bought a cylindrical record to play on it. The record was very scratched and printed on it in English lettering were the words: 'Oh, you beautiful doll!' She did not understand what the English words meant, so she rechristened the tune in Russian 'The Foxtrot of the Twenty-fifth of October'.

Piotr disliked his new garments, but he was loyal to the party line, despite the fact that his hammer-and-sickle necktie was continually sliding around the slippery collar to his left ear. He even practised smiling in the shaving mirror; and once when in a competition with the Tomsk Tractor-factory he created a new high record in production and was photographed as a hero of the industrial front for *Pravda*, he curled back his lips in so determined a rictus that the comrade-photographer started back in alarm, fearing assault.

All these things he endured with good will, but he hated the Foxtrot of the Twenty-fifth of October. At night now when he went home, instead of doing Müller's exercises to fit his muscles for the labours of the coming day, Fenja made him dance. She would push back the little table and the two chairs to the walls of their room, wind up the phonograph for a very long time indeed until the handle would go no farther, and put the needle to the cylinder. Then the irregular strains of the ragtime would issue wheezily from the brass trumpet. Sometimes when the needle passed over a part of the revolving cylinder less worn than the rest, the noise would become startlingly loud and Piotr give a startled jump.



'Don't be stupid, Piotr,' she would say, 'this is the new hythmus of the machine age. The art of music is in a constant state of flux. The harmonies of a Mozart or a Tchaikovsky, the heroics of a Wagner or a Borodin are no longer fitted to the tempo of our production. This is the new music of the machine, and we must dance to it.'

Then she would clutch him in her thin strong arms, and make him shuffle backwards and forwards about the room with her in an attempt to keep time with the music. Sometimes slyly he would stamp on her foot, but as Fenja Modjeska had a more natural talent in this direction than even he himself, it proved futile as a means of sabotage. With despair in his heart he shuffled lamely round the cramped room.

There was no coping at all with the flood of amenities. Fenja Modjeska bought herself a golden wedding ring; and she would twist it complacently around her finger, just as the merchants' wives used to do in the old days when the Popes from the cathedral came to drink tea with them.

She bought a new bright samovar and invited Comrade Stepan Barmansky and his wife, Aglaia, to supper: they drank tea with raspberry jam, and ate *bliny*, little pancakes stuffed with caviare and swimming in sour cream. Afterwards they played *stukolka*, but not for money, with a brand-new pack of cards; and Fenja made Aglaia green with envy by twisting her new golden ring about in an ostentatious manner. Moreover, she infuriated Comrade Stepan Barmansky by interrupting the *stukolka* to rewind the phonograph, just when he had dealt himself a good hand.

Fenja Modjeska saw to it that they never lacked music; the strains of the Foxtrot of the Twenty-fifth of October resounded coarsely throughout the whole of the evening; until the comrade living in the room above hammered hard on the floor with the heel of his top-boot, and dislodged the framed enlargement of Lenin from its hook in the Lenin-corner. It crashed down heavily.

'That's a bad omen,' said Aglaia spitefully.

'You should be ashamed of yourself, comrade Aglaia,' replied Fenja Modjeska in a serious voice. 'That is mere bourgeois superstition. The emancipated workers of our Soviet fatherland control their social and economic environment, and therefore remain unaffected by such counter-revolutionary phenomena as omens.'

Much as Piotr disliked this merry social intercourse, he was

thankful at least that Fenja Modjeska had not made him dance the Foxtrot of the Twenty-fifth of October with her in front of Comrade Stepan and his wife Aglaia.

When Piotr awoke in the morning the room was swept, the samovar bubbling, and Fenja Modjeska stood at the table stirring raspberry jam into the glasses of tea. This puzzled him, for usually they managed the interior economy of their apartment on a strictly co-operative basis; and moreover it was only on exceptional occasions that tea was drunk with raspberry jam: usually they sipped the brew through a lump of sugar (clamped between the teeth and buttressed by the tongue) thus sweetening the liquid before contact with the palate. Fenja Modjeska noticed the mild conjecture in his sleepy eyes.

'Piotr,' she said gaily, 'this is not only a fifth day, our free day, but one of social significance. This afternoon the G.P.U. band is going to play in the Park of Rest and Culture: all Party members with knowledge and experience of the new foxtrot dancing are desired to attend and exhibit their proficiency before their fellow workers and thus in a practical manner demonstrate their solidarity with the vast forward movement that is taking place on the social and cultural front in all parts of the Soviet Union'.

Piotr sighed as he raised the glass to his lips. Fenja Modjeska watched him shrewdly.

'The tea is not very hot, Piotr,' she said, 'there is no real necessity to blow upon it.'

The Park of Rest and Culture was thronged with carefree workers in holiday attire. The sun shone warmly, gilding the river beyond; the trees curtseyed to the stir of the wind and lazily fluttered their myriad leaves; while the little birds in the branches piped defiant melodious answer to the crack and pop of the miniature rifles in the shooting galleries below. Stern young komсомols were blazing away at Messieurs Hitler, Mussolini, Franco and His Celestial Majesty, the Emperor of Manchukuo, who by reasons of mortality and the fluctuations of diplomacy had replaced Messieurs Pilsudski, Poincaré, Winston Churchill and General Chiang Kai-Shek as targets and symbols of capitalist oppression.<sup>1</sup>

A tow-headed youngster wearing the badge of the League of Aviation and Chemical Defence scored a direct hit on the Führer.

<sup>1</sup> We understand there has since been another change.

Iron Cross, acquired (or so the German comrades in exile all swore) for an unrecorded deed of valour in unknown circumstances on a date unspecified. A bell rang and the Iron Cross whizzed merrily around like a Catherine Wheel.

'Well done,' said Piotr.

'It is fine to be praised by a worker like yourself, comrade,' said the boy.

'You know my husband?' asked Fenja Modjeska with some surprise.

'I cut your photograph out of *Pravda* and framed it,' he answered, turning to the blushing hero of the industrial front. My comrades and I followed every statistic of your production-struggle with those Tomsk tractor fellows. . . . It was almost unbearably exciting. Right up to the last minute it seemed as though you were beaten: but that final burst of Stakhanov-like energy was dynamic; simply irresistible. When the last figures came through, we all jumped to our feet and cried: "Three cheers for Bolshoi! Three cheers for Comrade Piotr!"'

'Yes, we gave them a licking,' said Comrade Piotr, modestly, but it was fine struggle.'

'And now to-day we are going to lead in the new foxtrot dancing,' added Fenja Modjeska proudly.

'Before you do that,' said the boy, 'I have a favour to ask: my fellow-members of the League of Aviation and Chemical Defence are taking part in the opening of the New Parachute-jump tower which will undoubtedly help to spread air-mindedness among the workers and peasants visiting the Park of Rest and Culture. If Comrade Piotr would honour us by making the inaugural jump . . .?'

'Certainly he will,' said Fenja Modjeska. 'I will wait for you near the dancing-stage and watch, Piotr. After your descent you can join me there, ready for the first foxtrot.'

The lift shot upwards through the soaring steel lattice-work of the parachute tower; and stopped with a jerk at the topmost platform.

'My comrades are very grateful to you,' said the Komsomol, and would like to name the tower "the Comrade Piotr tower" in your memory.'

'That is too great an honour,' mumbled Piotr as he stepped out of the lift on to the windy eminence. Far below them lay stretched

the various amenities of the Park of Rest and Culture; spectators thronged the base of the tower, a black cluster of little atomic The smiling instructor stepped forward.

'There is no danger, comrade,' he said; at the same time placing the folded parachute on Piotr's back and adjusting the harness on his thighs and shoulders. 'Just step to the edge of the platform and pull this cord—the parachute will be released, and as the wind inflates it, will swing you from the tower. When you're in the air tug alternately to left and right on the guide-ropes above you until the swinging stops: then you will float gently to the earth.' He pulled the broad canvas safety-belt tightly around Piotr's middle and secured the interlocking staple with a steel peg. Piotr stepped to the edge of the platform, his hand on the cord.

'Happy landing, Comrade Piotr!' cried the Komsomol.

'Pull!' cried the instructor.

Piotr pulled the rip-cord: nothing happened: then suddenly he was plucked violently into space. He was held firmly aloft, he swung like a pendulum. He hauled on the guide-ropes, as a child controls a garden swing. The pendulum-like motion gradually ceased; and he felt himself sustained by the buoyant folds of the parachute, floating in delicious easy motion through the empty air.

A ripple of white surged over the black cluster at the tower's base. A faint noise was up-borne by the wind: the crowd watching him were waving and cheering. Slowly they became plainer: and beyond them he could see the neat square of the dancing place, the venetian standards hedging it about were like slender pencils, and the voluminous flags like dolls' pocket-handkerchiefs. The G.P.U. bandstand in the centre was a tiny arbour in a miniature Japanese garden.

A pleased smile hovered about his pale lips. The gentle motion of descent lulled his senses, and poetic emotions, long sternly repressed, took possession of him.

'This is true ecstasy,' he thought, 'to glide thus, like a bird—' all poets have cherished it as the symbol of their art. It is true, of course, that Pegasus to all outward seeming is more horse than bird, but Gogol, when this vision inflamed his ardent spirit, as he saw the Russian troïka with its three-spanned team wild and spurning the steppe, named it majestically "bird-troïka". But of all the mighty ones, the English revolutionary poet, P. B. Shelley came nearest to the secret truth of beauty—"The deep blue thro"



vingest"—"The pale purple even melts around thy flight." How serene! How beautiful! To sing in solitude!

A sudden cacophony, like the wailing of damned souls, cracked upon his dreamy musing. In agony he looked below: he was poised above the dancing place: couples were jerking eccentrically in rigid embraces: The G.P.U. band was blasting forth the demoniac strains of the Foxtrot of the Twenty-fifth of October.

All this was still distant and miniature, but none the less he thought to see Fenja Modjeska standing there and waving with great energy. Deep melancholy invaded him: he felt his right hand move to the safety-belt and clutch the steel peg. With sudden resolution he wrenched it from the staple: the belt snapped open. As he toppled forward he felt the harness slip from his shoulders. He hung for a moment, head downwards, suspended dizzily by his thighs, but soon the smooth harness slid upwards the length of his legs: he fell . . . down . . . down. . . .

The parachute, freed of its burden, rocketed smoothly into the upper air. At the terminal altitude it began to drift, variably enough persistently in accordance with the prevailing wind-direction, northwards. It passed over the multiform domes and corner modernistic outlines of the city, and over the wooded suburbs with their summer-houses. Veering a few points N.N.E. it sailed across the State Vegetable and Cattle Breeding farms of Vologda, then over the busy shipping of Archangel. In the final stages of the journey it traversed barren tundra and frozen waters, coming finally to rest on the island of Novaya Zemlya in the Parents Sea, where it lay a little tattered but still serviceable, caught on an ice-hummock. Here it was found by an Eskimo Komsomol of the Yakut tribe. He was tempted to steal it, but recognizing it by certain marks as the property of the League of Aviation and Chemical Defence, of which he was a pioneer member in the Arctic, took it to the meteorological station at Matochin Shar. The observer noted its recovery in his log, adding with some regret: 'I presume that it had been released as part of the Meteorological Survey Plan, but owing to violent buffetings in turbulent air the recording instruments have probably become detached, and hence no observations can be reported.'

# A. J. A. SYMONS

## WILDE AT OXFORD—II

### THE MIGHT-HAVE BEEN

OSCAR'S Oxford career stretches over four happy years. He went to Magdalen in 1874, a year which saw the downfall of the Tichborne claimant and King Koffee of Ashanti, in which Gladstone made one of his periodical retirements and Disraeli entered upon his first innings of real power. In the following twelve months Parnell entered Parliament; and England, with the help of the Rothschilds, brought off her coup in Suez Canal shares. It was a period of political all-sorts. A year later Europe was shocked by the Bulgarian atrocities, alarmed by the Russo-Turkish war, relieved by the Treaty of Berlin; and meanwhile the Irish Party began its famous campaign of Parliamentary obstruction. But these public events drew little notice from the young scholar absorbed by his own development, by his three masters, and by the problem of faith. Like Mahaffy, Oscar belonged by birth to the ascendant Protestants of Dublin. Ruskin also, though he praised Catholic art, was a Protestant, a severe and bigoted opponent of the Catholic faith. In Oscar, however, other forces pulsed. He had read Newman, and he had read history. More logical than Ruskin, he found it difficult to reject the Catholic faith while admiring above all else the works of Catholic hands. His mind had been turned to Italy, and therefore to Rome. He wanted to see for himself; and rejoiced at a chance to make an Italian holiday with Mahaffy and one of his pupils, William Goulding, son of a prominent Dublin merchant. The long ingenuous, prosy letters still exist in which Oscar described to his mother his journey to Florence, Venice, Milan, Padua, Verona and back through Paris; and if proof were needed of Ruskin's influence on him, they would supply it. 'Went in the morning to see S. Lorenzo—built in the usual Florentine way, cruciform; long aisle supported by Grecian pillars—a gorgeous dome in the centre and three small aisles leading off it. Behind it are the two chapels of the Medici. The first, the Burial chapel, is magnificent of enormous height; octagonal in shape. Walls built entirely of gorgeous blocks of marble, all inlaid with various devices and

different colours—polished like a looking glass—six giant sarcophagi of granite and porphyry stand in six niches, on top of each of them a cushion of inlaid mosaic bearing a gold crown.' He looked conscientiously through the missals and manuscripts in the Bibliotheca Laurenziana, at the museums, at the picture galleries, at all the sights of the Italian cities; he wondered at Giotto's Baptistery at Padua, at Dante's house; he saw *Hamlet* played in Italian in the Roman Amphitheatre at Verona; he busied himself with Raphaels, Correggios, Peruginos, and paintings 'that Morris and Rossetti would love'. Wherever he went he kept careful notes, which were embodied in his long letters home—the letters of an industrious, painstaking, ignorant observer, filled with youthful, voluble enthusiasm for all visible works of art.

His Protestantism was more than ever shaken. He turned, as he said, 'wistfully' towards 'that religion which had inspired the great Italian painters', and began to write poems in which his indecision appears very plainly; indecision prompted by his subconscious feeling that the best religion is that which produces the best art. It was a pleasant form of self-consciousness, which many young men have indulged before and since, frequently in sonnets. Oscar did not escape that form. In a sonnet *On approaching Italy* he expresses letter-paper grief for the Pope's voluntary imprisonment in the Vatican; in *San Miniato* literary remorse for his mispent days; and though lack of money prevented the extension of his journey to Rome, he avows, in *Rome Unvisited*, an ever-fervent hope that he may

'. . . see before I die  
The only God-anointed King  
And hear the silver trumpets ring  
A triumph as he passes by'.

And later in the same poem he prophesies that, before the autumn leaves fall,

'I may have run the glorious race  
And caught the torch while yet aflame,  
And called upon the holy name  
Of Him who now doth hide His face'.

He never did catch the torch of faith, but when he returned to Oxford the question of conversion was still busy in his mind. He sent his poems to the *Dublin University Magazine*, which

published them, and so brought to the notice of Dublin society the fact that Sir William Wilde's younger son was (in a phrase he used to Bodley) 'swaying between Romanism and Atheism'. It was a long uncertainty—perhaps a life-long one—for to the end Oscar retained the sinner's preference for the faith of Augustine and the Borgias. In a financial sense, if in no other, and if without intending it, he was a sufferer for 'the cause', for about this time his favourite cousin died suddenly from a chill caught while riding. Oscar and his brother Willy had always been looked upon as the heirs, but when the will was read it was learned that £8,000 had been left to Sir William Wilde's hospital, £2,000 to Willy, and only £100 to Oscar. Moreover, the cousin, who was joint inheritor with Oscar of a fishing lodge in Connemara, left the waverer his share conditionally on his not becoming a Roman Catholic for five years. Oscar took the news calmly, but commented, in a letter to a friend:

'He was, poor fellow, bigotedly intolerant of the Catholics and seeing me on the brink cut me out of his will. It is a terrible disappointment; you see I suffer a good deal from my Roman leanings, in pocket and mind.

. . . Fancy a man going before God and the eternal silence with his wretched Protestant prejudices and bigotry clinging to him still.'

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In 1876, while Oscar was still busy at Oxford, Sir William Wilde died. Like many successful men who earn large incomes the estate he left was small; his widow found herself possessed of some £7,000, while Willie and Oscar each inherited property bringing in about £150 a year. An interesting volume might be written concerning Sir William and his wife; it would throw many lights on the Ireland of pre-Parnellite days, and perhaps on the character of his two sons. William Wilde was born in Ireland, passed his life there, and became, on a small scale, an Irish landlord; but he retained the Protestant feeling of his great-grandfather, a Durham business man who emigrated to Ireland in the eighteenth century. The son of this emigrant married a daughter of the O'Flynnns, and evidently belonged to the upper middle class, since of his children one, Ralph Wilde, won the Berkeley Gold Medal for Greek at Trinity (as Oscar did later) and took



Holy Orders; another son, Thomas, became a doctor and married a lady related by descent to the families of Surridge and Ouseley. Oscar's father was the son of this Dr. Wilde. He was born in 1815, and was 36 when, in 1851, he married Jane Francesca Elgee, granddaughter of the Protestant Archdeacon of Wexford, and then 27 years of age. On her mother's side Jane Elgee was descended from the Kingsbury family; she was also a grandniece of Charles Maturin, author of a once famous, now forgotten romance, *Melmoth the Wanderer*, for which Balzac wrote a continuation.

William Wilde was a very successful surgeon, despite his peculiarities. Two years after his marriage he was appointed Surgeon-Oculist to the Queen in Ireland; later he was created a Chevalier of the Kingdom of Sweden; and in 1864 he was knighted by the Viceroy, Lord Carlisle. He spent his large income lavishly on himself, on his family, and in the cause of science and archæology. His widow claimed, with justice, that 'There was probably no man of his generation more versed in our national literature, in all that concerned the land and the people, the arts, architecture, topography, statistics and even the legends of the country; but, above all, in his favourite department, the descriptive illustration of Ireland, past and present, in historic and prehistoric times, he has justly gained a wide reputation as one of the most learned and accurate, and at the same time one of the most popular writers of the age on Irish subjects'. He founded the Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital, and was for a time President of the Irish Academy. In all he wrote over twenty books, of which several, notably *The Closing Years of Dean Swift*, retain a fading interest to-day.

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Despite the fact that with his father's death Oscar's prospects vanished, he seems to have contemplated an early marriage. He was fond of inviting young women to his rooms (with the chaperons required by the period) on occasions which he referred to as 'beauty parties'. The poetess who afterwards became Mrs. Margaret L. Woods was a regular visitor, and admired her long-haired host as a brilliant creature whose genius was the ground for the dislike which so many other undergraduates seemed to feel for him. Nor was his heart untouched. While he was still at Oxford a relative, whose parents had brought up a young orphaned cousin of Oscar's, had occasion to write him a long

letter, characteristic of the time and its manners, in which, after apologizing for touching on what might seem an almost sacred subject, she explains that she possesses 'dear Eva's' confidence, that he may rely on her discretion, and then proceeds to give him good advice: 'I do not know what your intentions may be, or what are your ideas for the future, or in what circumstances you may be placed. But my object in writing to you is to impress on you that my parents stand in the place of dear Eva's father, and once really assured that they were furthering her happiness, granting they were satisfied on this point, they would I am sure aid forward any scheme at any cost or trouble to the attainment of such an end. Therefore if you are truly in earnest as I have reason to believe, I would suggest your frankly coming to them, and they would give you all the help in their power.'

It seems that Oscar did not come forward. And it seems, also, that his feelings were inflammable, for another lady indignantly wrote to him after a holiday visit home:

'DEAR OSCAR,

'I was very much pained the last time I was at your house when I went into the drawing room and saw Fidelia sitting upon your knee. Young as she is, she ought to have had (and so I told her) the instinctive delicacy that would have shrunk from it—but oh! Oscar, the thing was neither right, nor manly, nor gentlemanlike in you. You have disappointed me—nay, so low and vulgar was it, that I could not have believed anyone of refined mind capable of such a thing.

'She is the one child now left me and—I say it advisedly—would rather see her dead than bold, free, or immodest in any way.

'Now to touch another matter—I have been almost amused at the way you have often treated me as though I were a fool—as to kissing Fidelia when you met her—that is, trying to do it out of sight as it were—or *apparently* so—as for instance the last day I saw you—you left me, a lady, *to open the hall door for myself*, you staying behind at the same time in the hall to kiss Fidelia. Did you think for a moment that I was so supremely stupid as not to know that you always kissed F. when you met her, if you had an opportunity?'

But though he was, obviously, susceptible to the charms of the

girls and young women with whom he was on visiting or kissing terms, Oscar followed the lead of two of his masters, Ruskin and Pater, in taking a visual view of life; and since he made beauty to the eye the criterion of his judgment, he began to give expression, both in his conversation and in what he wrote, to an unusual, almost exaggerated admiration of boyish handsomeness—as, for instance, in a prose description of the Tomb of Keats, written at Rome on his second Italian journey, in which he describes how he ‘stood beside the mean grave of this divine boy’ and ‘thought of him as of a Priest of Beauty slain before his time’, recalling Guido’s Saint Sebastian ‘as I saw him at Genoa, a lovely brown boy with crisp, clustering hair and red lips, bound by his evil enemies to a tree’. These references are unexceptionable; certainly Keats died in youth, and the description of St. Sebastian is apt. But, like many of Pater’s phrases, they made some readers uncomfortable, and help to explain an otherwise obscure entry in Bodley’s diary: ‘Breakfasted at the Mitre. Wilde objected to the unnatural chaff. Then to Magdalen where we chaffed Wilde more. White says old Wilde is a damned compromising acquaintance.’ This was almost certainly smoke without fire; there is no evidence otherwise; but it shows that, even thus early, the obscure impulses of Oscar’s nature had begun to reveal themselves to onlookers, though perhaps not to himself.

Though he continued his pose of indolence, he was still secretly industrious, working at a long essay on *The Rise of Historical Criticism* which was not printed until after his death. So far as is known, he never attempted to publish it; hence we may assume that he did not regard the essay as successful or valuable, as more than an undergraduate exercise. Nevertheless, there are some suggestive phrases in it; and his letters written at this time have a few sparkles of his later humour—as when, describing a charming garden, he says ‘only that there are no serpents or apples it would be quite Eden’.

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It was not enough for Oscar to read and dream about Greece; he was eager to see for himself. And so, early in 1877, he took part in an adventure which turned his mind for many years from the Catholic Church. By way of Rome, Genoa, and Ravenna, he joined Mahaffy, Goulding, and another undergraduate, George

Macmillan, at Brindisi; and on Easter Sunday these four philhellenic travellers boarded the *Trinacria*, bound for Corfu and Greece. They paced the deck till ten, watching the stars come out and the coast of Italy fade from view, and then turned in, exultingly, feverishly, romantically exalted by the fact that the land on which their eyes would open in the morning would be Greece. Macmillan woke, in fact, at half-past three, and peered without result into the moonlight; but at five he was up again, gazing with delight at Corfu and the Acroceraunian mountains. Even the indolent Oscar rose with the dawn that day.

To us, of a later, more travelled generation, so much excitement may seem surprising. But in the 'seventies a journey through Greece was a very uncommon thing for Englishmen. The roads were bad; brigands infested the byways: the kidnapping of visitors was an unpleasant possibility. Only twenty or so years before Ruskin had abandoned the project on account of its dangers; seven years earlier four well-known Englishmen had been first held for ransom and then murdered. Even those nineteenth-century poets who owed so much to Greece—Shelley, Landor, Swinburne—never penetrated beyond Italy. Moreover at that time, scholarship meant Greece and little else; and three, at least, of the travellers were steeped in classical scholarship. Oscar Macmillan and Mahaffy had none of the modern scepticism concerning the Greeks and their culture. They believed that the land on which they were shortly to set foot had witnessed the golden age of the human mind; that poetry, drama, philosophy, architecture and sculpture had all found their noblest expression at the hands of the Hellenes; and that the country of the Greeks, in another sense than Palestine, was the holy land, from which the inspiration of Europe was derived. So at Corfu it was an excitement merely to see Greek names and inscriptions over the shop-fronts.

But Corfu was no more than the door—even the back door—and they were glad to start for Zante. Leucadia and Actium were passed in the night. Leaving the steamer to pursue her course in the Gulf of Corinth, the undergraduates and the tutor pulled ashore and, through the kindness of an American merchant, made their way across to the mainland in a sailing ship, in company with Dr. Hirschfeld, director of the German excavations at Olympia.



Next day Oscar and his friends found horses and, full of enthusiasm, started off. The way led through richly cultivated country to the valley of the Alpheus; soon they were in sight of the famous plain whereon the Olympic games were held, where now a bloodier game is being played to very different music. It was only two years before that the German expedition had begun its fruitful labours of excavation, and many fine sculptures and fragments, since removed, still lay near their places of discovery. The four Victorians gazed with awe and admiration at their first Greek temple, only disappointed that the columns were made of rough composite, not fine Parian, marble. That night they stayed at Druva, where a lamb was roasted whole for them, and they made the acquaintance, with dislike, of resined wine. Early the following morning the cheerful cavalcade set off for the temple of Apollo at Bassae. Well mounted, happy, expectant, they followed the right bank of the river; and for many years Macmillan remembered the scarlet, purple and white anemones that shone about their path; the abounding evergreens, the pear trees loaded with white blossom, and the judas trees in trembling pink. The way (a rough track) led up and down among hillocks heavily wooded with oak, fir and pine; then through a green marshy plain; then up a steep, dangerous rocky path whose slippery surface made them fearful; on through wilder and wilder scenery, now descending to the dried bed of a stream, now climbing to some sweep of moorland covered with white heather six feet high and carpeted with orchids and gladioli. It was a true vision to the young poet, riding in fact, not merely metaphor, through Arcady. The travellers lay that night in Andritzena, tired out after ten hours in the saddle, all four boarded and lodged in one small room containing nothing but one chair with a broken back, another chair still whole, and a few three-legged stools. Not till next day, after another ride, this time through heavy rain, did they reach Apollo's temple. And for a whole week, during which they rode cross the Peloponnese from shore to shore, the quartet—Oscar, Mahaffy, Macmillan and Goulding—continued in this way, ignoring all discomforts and mishaps, thrall'd by the beauty of the country, its people and its treasures. No bandits appeared, and the only approach to bloodshed came from the owner of the horses they rode. He accompanied the party some part of the way on foot, and naturally objected to any pace faster than a walk,

basing his objection, however, not on his own inability to keep up, but on the theory that rapid travelling was bad for his horses whose natural pace was a gentle amble. The friends, weary of such slow progress, persisted in urging their mounts to a trot whenever possible, and at last to a gallop; whereupon the hot-tempered guide, losing control of himself, seized Oscar's bridle, and drew his knife upon the rider. Oscar (with what Macmillan subsequently called great presence of mind) drew a revolver from his pocket and pointed it at his assailant. There was deadlock for a few seconds; then the Greek, jerking his knife back into his girdle melodramatically bared his breast as if to invite destruction. Without argument, Oscar replaced his pistol and rode on.

Many were their adventures and experiences. It was only fifty-three years since Byron had died at Missolonghi; and they were able to talk with veterans who, though they did not remember him, had fought in the War of Independence. They looked in surprise at the Pyrrhic dance; at men wearing white linen kilts braided jackets, and the scarlet fez; at a half-grown olive-complexioned boy whose beauty startled Macmillan into a memorandum of it; and were rescued from an indignant, extortionate innkeeper by the local policeman. They saw all the memorials of the great past—temples, theatres, statues, tombs and gateways—deciphering such inscriptions as were visible with a reverent interest. They saw Megalopolis, Tegea, Argos, Mycenæ, Tiryns and Nauplia. And so at last they rode to the little harbour of Epidaurus, where they soon found a sailing boat to carry them to the Piræus. Across the blue waters at their feet they could see the hills of Attica, locked in whose embrace was Athens.

Even so, they did not reach Athens without mishap. A storm nor'wester blew athwart their course in the Saronic Gulf; and the captain, not caring to venture his small vessel, ran for shelter into the harbour of Ægina, where a collision shattered one of the bulwarks and might well have sent them to the bottom. A amiable Greek naval officer offered to take the party across next day in his steam launch, naming four in the morning as the hour of departure. But the adverse wind still blew, and it was not till two in the afternoon that the launch could start.

Athens was not a disappointment, but the daylight endorsement of a dream. Oscar was dazzled by what he saw. For a week he wandered through museums and monuments, visited Marathon

and places round about, heard, thought, spoke in Greek. The Acropolis, the Parthenon, the Erectheum satisfied his expectation and sense of wonder, and vivified the paganism that had fought so long with his vague religious feeling. Here was visible, tangible, abundant, non-Catholic beauty—beauty, the only truth he was then in a mood to accept; beside it all other truth was vain. Here was antiquity, still living. The itinerant æsthete was converted, no doubt.

Back in Oxford, the pace of Oscar's life began to quicken. Before leaving for Rome he had written to a friend, for whom he engaged to burn a candle at the Holy Shrine:

'this is an era in my life, a crisis—I wish I could look into the seeds of Time and see what is coming';

but now, on his return, his changed attitude caused another friend to write:

'DEAR OSCAR,

' . . . I was very sorry, though hardly surprised, at the tone of your letter. Oxford, heaven knows, is an unchristian place enough, but I suppose the atmosphere you live in elsewhere is a hundred times more opposed to the Church. I have somehow the impression that the present is a crisis in your life, and had the hope that even your short visit to Rome [might] have done something to guide your wandering steps to the Fold. I suppose it was not to be so, and that you are content to live for yourself alone, and shut your eyes to the future—as long as you can. It is useless to talk of your weakness and want of principle—truly a strange reason for turning your back on what alone will make you strong (as well might a starving man, on the plea of hunger, refuse to stretch out his hand to food) and as for your want of faith and enthusiasm, you cannot pretend to believe that God, who has given you grace to see His truth will not also keep you firm when you choose to embrace it. You *know* He called you to be a Child of the Church, but you are unwilling to give up a hundred and one little sins. It is sheer cowardice, nothing more. It is not even, with you, a question of choosing between two religions, the false and the true—no, you must be a Catholic or nothing. Your choice is between God and the devil, neither more nor less. How *can* you hesitate? I speak strongly because I

... speak for the last time—perhaps I may have said too much already—however, the subject is closed for ever between us . . . do not send me your sonnets; I do not care to see them.’

\* \* \* \*

Oscar had overstayed his leave in Greece; and the dons of his college fined him £45 for unauthorized absence in term time; but this substantial sum was returned to him in the following year when, despite being ploughed in Divinity, he won a First Class in ‘Greats’ and, a little later, the Newdigate Prize Poem. Two years previously he had been placed in the First Class in Moderations, so that he could now receive the congratulations due to a double first; while by winning the Newdigate he was publicly following in the path of two of his idols, Ruskin and Matthew Arnold. The young Irishman was justifying his brilliant promise; and despite the disappointing smallness of his father’s estate, his exuberance rose. A fellowship seemed certain; and with a fellowship and his own small patrimony he could have lived comfortably.

His victory in the Newdigate competition was both fortunate and deserved; deserved, since his entry was above the level of most of the successful poems of former years, and fortunate because the subject set was Ravenna, which he had visited on the way to Greece, and, moved by its fallen grandeur, with no premonition of the future, marked down as subject for a long poem. In accordance with custom, it was his duty to declaim his winning poem in the Sheldonian Theatre, a task which his naturally excellent voice enabled him to perform with distinction. His declamation was good enough to be talked about. So was his appearance at a fancy dress ball, dressed in plum-coloured velvet as Prince Rupert—an occasion which pleased him so much that he bought the dress and, according to rumour, used to sit in it in his rooms, admiring himself. He wrote other poems, which he found no difficulty in publishing in Irish newspapers and magazines. And a long, careful account of the Grosvenor Gallery Exhibition of 1877, which was printed in the *Dublin University Magazine*, brought him praise from Pater. Lady Wilde was more proud than ever of her brilliant son, and talked constantly of him in London. But despite his triumphs he was not offered a fellowship; and so, midway in 1878, disappointed, he left for London. Like some of his own later heroes, he was over-educated; he had spent seven years at universities, many more at school. Far gone



were the days when he could speak of going to Hampshire 'to kill time and pheasants', or 'to Longford for the partridges', or write from the family lodge:

'I have been here fishing for the last three weeks. . . . The fishing has not been as good as usual. I only got one salmon, about 7½ lb. The sea trout, however, are very plentiful; we get a steady average of four a day, and lots of brown trout, so it is not difficult to amuse oneself.'

Ruskin, Arnold and Pater had supplanted such recreations, Tanagra statuettes the place of brown trout. It was a turning point, and even then he recognized it. The recognition took him on a sudden impulse to Brompton Oratory, where he confessed to Father Bowden, who wrote to him next day:

'MY DEAR MR. WILDE,

'Whatever your first purpose may have been in your visit yesterday there is no doubt that as a fact you did freely & entirely lay open to me your life's history & your soul's state. And it was God's grace which made you do so.

'You would not have spoken of your aimlessness & misery or of your temporal misfortune to a priest in a first interview unless you hoped that I should have some remedy to suggest, & that not of man's making. Be true to yourself then, it was no power or influence of mine (which it is nonsense to speak of) but the voice of your own conscience urging you to make a new start, and escape from your present unhappy self, which provoked your confession. Let me then repeat to you as solemnly as I can what I said yesterday, you have like everyone else an evil nature & this in your case has become more corrupt by bad influences mental & moral, & by positive sin; hence you speak as a dreamer & sceptic with no faith in anything & no purpose in life. On the other hand God in His mercy has not left you [to] remain contented in this state. He has proved to you the hollowness of this world in the unexpected loss of your fortune & has removed thereby a great obstacle to your conversion; He allows you to feel the sting of conscience & the yearnings for a holy pure & earnest life. It depends therefore on your own free will which life you lead. As God calls you, He is bound, remember to give you the means to obey the call.

'Do so promptly & cheerfully & difficulties disappear & with your conversion your true happiness would begin. As Catholic you would find yourself a new man in the order of nature as of grace. I mean that you would put from you all that is affected & unreal & a thing unworthy of your better self & live a life full of the deepest interests as a man who feels he has a soul to save & but a few fleeting hours in which to save it. I trust then you will come on Thursday & have another talk; you may be quite sure I shall urge you to do nothing but what your conscience dictates. In the meantime pray hard & talk little.

Yours very sincerely,

H. SEBAST<sup>N</sup> BOWDEN

## SONIA BROWNELL

# THE EUSTON ROAD GROUP

ON May 17th an exhibition of paintings by the Euston Road Group will be opened at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, and will continue for two months. This has been organized by the Contemporary Art Society, whose work since the war deserves great praise and particularly support. Not only does it still continue to buy paintings by living artists for presentation to gallery but it has organized exhibitions of paintings for sale throughout the country, of which this is the fifth.

Everyone who is interested in contemporary painting knows the name 'The Euston Road School'. Some look on it as a movement of vitality, promise and importance; while others, amazed that work which appears to them so commonplace and unexciting can have attracted attention, attribute its success to chance. As this is the first exhibition to be devoted entirely to their work, it will be possible to see it as they themselves wish to present it; for although some of Coldstream and Pasmore's best pictures are unfortunately in America, the selection is certainly representative and indicates their approach to their work. Although each of the painters constituting the group has an entirely personal style there is a similarity of approach which gives the exhibition the unity which has caused the interest taken in their work to be as collective as well as individual.

The Euston Road Group consists of only a few painters and their pupils, with not a very large body of work. Claude Rogers, William Coldstream and Rodrigo Moynihan were at the Slade together in 'Tonks' last years, and shortly after they met Victor Pasmore and Graham Bell. The School as a school was opened by Coldstream, Pasmore and Rogers in 1938, when they took a studio off the Euston Road. It was Sir Kenneth Clark who was largely responsible for this venture, as his patronage enabled three of them to devote their entire time to painting and give up the various jobs by which they had been supporting themselves, while his continued encouragement ensured the survival of the School; Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant and Mrs. Anrep were also among those whose interest and assistance were invaluable. Their pupils were young students who admired their work and painted in the studio with them. Though at present—as is inevitable and only natural—the work of these pupils is largely imitative and the influence of the older painters remains the most striking feature of many of their pictures, some of them show great promise; Colin McInnes, Denys Dawney and Basil Rocke exhibit some interesting work, and Lawrence Gowing, who is beginning to make reputation for himself, is seen to advantage.

In the years leading up to 1938 they had, like most young painters, experimented in a variety of methods of painting, but a genuine similarity of interests and feeling had brought them together and gradually led them to the formation of styles alike enough to constitute a group; so that this group was not an artificial product, but the outcome of a natural growth, and the 'Euston Road Style' not the result of a programme or manifesto, but a natural development which they had been at no pains to cultivate. They had found no satisfaction in working within the conventions of any of the modern schools, nor had they the urge to rely on the exploitation of any personal idiosyncrasies exaggerated into a style of extreme individualism. Behind the work of these painters was a desire to paint unhampered by what they considered to be the mannerisms of most contemporary schools of painting, to try to see the objects they painted directly and to render them in all their complexity.

The painters of the Euston Road School resemble each other in that they all paint almost entirely from nature. They find the release of their imagination in the visual selection of subject-matter

which for any reason at all excites or interests them, and in the careful exploring of its appearance. And so their subjects are nearly always simple ones, people or things which can be directly observed while the artist works. To try to render what was seen in all its complexities, although certain of its features may appear to be unsuitable for translation into an existing pictorial manner is their concern; and it was particularly interesting at a time when such methods were not generally used by the younger painters. The Post Impressionists seemed to have driven too much of the humanism out of their art and to have narrowed it down to an affair of design, while the compulsory anarchy of the Surrealists was equally unsympathetic to the temperaments and talents of the Euston Road painters. They might perhaps be called 'prose-painters', for they work slowly, referring to the authority of the observed fact before making each statement. They do not deliberately set out to describe their emotions or allow their attention to be diverted from the visual appearance. Technically they work most often by building up their pictures with layer upon layer of their paint, reaching an impasto only at the end and in certain passages.

But if they are slow workers and their output compared with that of many modern painters small, their methods and approach are such as to allow them to work with deliberate clarity and some detachment; and the excitement of their work for the spectator lies in their ability to throw new light on plain subjects and make us as interested in them as the painters are themselves.

[Paintings by Pasmore and Gowing were reproduced in *Horizon*, Nos. 7 and 12.]

## ARTURO BAREA

# NOT SPAIN BUT HEMINGWAY

ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S new novel, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, was cast for the success it is now reaping along the whole front line from Left Wing reviewers to Hollywood producers.

It is a tale of violence, war and love, blood and thunder on the Spanish soil; it combines the romanticism and glamour of bull-fighting with the ugly realism of a civil war; it is heroic, sensational, sensual, lyrical, and honestly anti-fascist without going



for politics; it contains one set of characters—Castilian peasants—which deserve the cliché praise ‘sober in outline like an old woodcut’, and another set of intellectually intriguing and exotic characters—Russian journalists and generals. It shows the inner problems of the author through his hero, the American scholar and Communist who is serving behind the Fascist lines, a true man of action, yet wrestling with his very uncommunistic, honest-to-god humanist soul. It describes the violence and horror of the Spanish War so that the reader who had been in love with a strange Spain of his own nostalgia sees all his vague imaginings assuming shape and life, and feels himself to be penetrating into the innermost recesses of the Spanish soul. It is written with an excellent technique of realism, and yet spares delicate feelings by putting the foulest oaths and obscenities in Spanish and italics (English readers may or may not look up the words in a dictionary; in any case they would not find half of them), thus noticeably reducing the amount of muckings, sons of bitches and hells.

I myself was fascinated by the book and felt it to be honest in so far as it renders Hemingway’s real vision. And yet I find myself awkwardly alone in the conviction that, as a novel about Spaniards and their war, it is unreal and, in the last analysis, deeply untruthful, though practically all the critics claim the contrary, whatever their objections to other aspects of the book:

‘You come to understand much of Spain which is not always, or even often, to be found in the histories.’

‘Hemingway knows his Spain profoundly. . . . In miniature, Hemingway has written the war the Spanish were fighting.’

‘. . . here, in his astonishingly real Spanish conversation, he has surpassed anything I have ever seen. . . . Mr. Hemingway understands the hierarchy of Spanish blasphemy, the proper place of each rococo phrase. . . . Horrifying and sickening, the story has nevertheless that theatrical variety of incidents, that primitive realism and capacity to catch every emotion that was felt by the people as a whole. . . .’

‘The Spanish peasants who help him in his dangerous errand are superbly described . . . all are alive and astonishingly themselves; Mr. Hemingway has never done anything better.’

As a Spaniard, and one who has lived through the period of our

war which provides Hemingway with his stage setting, I cannot point by point to the following somewhat different conclusion.

Reading *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, you will indeed come to understand some aspects of Spanish character and life, but you will misunderstand more, and more important ones at that.

Ernest Hemingway does know 'his Spain'. But it is precisely his intimate knowledge of this narrow section of Spain which has blinded him to a wider and deeper understanding, and made it difficult for him to 'write the war we have been fighting'.

Some of his Spanish conversations are perfect, but others, often of great significance for the structure of the book, are totally un-Spanish. He has not mastered the intricate 'hierarchy of Spanish blasphemy' (anyhow the most difficult thing for a foreigner in any language, since it is based on ancient taboos and half-conscious superstitions). He commits a series of grave linguistic-psychological mistakes in this book—such, indeed, as I have heard him commit when he joked with the orderlies in my Madrid office. Then, we grinned at his solecisms because we liked him.

Hemingway has understood the emotions which our 'people as a whole' felt in the bull-ring, but not those which it felt in the collective action of war and revolution.

Some of the Castilian peasants Hemingway has created are real and alive, but others are artificial or out of place. Although all are magnificently described, in none of them has he touched the root.

Ernest Hemingway himself and his book are of such importance that I think it necessary to specify, and if I can, to prove and explain my objections. After all, they cover not only the literary picture of Spaniards and their war, but also the quality of Hemingway's creative work in this instance, and the problem of literary realism as a whole. The strength of his artistry makes fiction sound like distilled reality. The reader may well follow the lead of the critics; he may accept the book because it is a powerful work of art and implicitly believe in the inner truthfulness of Hemingway's Spain. For purely Spanish reasons I want to fight against the danger of a spurious understanding of my people.

\* \* \* \* \*

The book relates an episode in the Republican guerilla warfare of May 1937. It takes place in the Sierra of the province of Segovia, and the *guerrilleros* concerned come from a small town, rather village, in the province of Avila. (It is more correct to call



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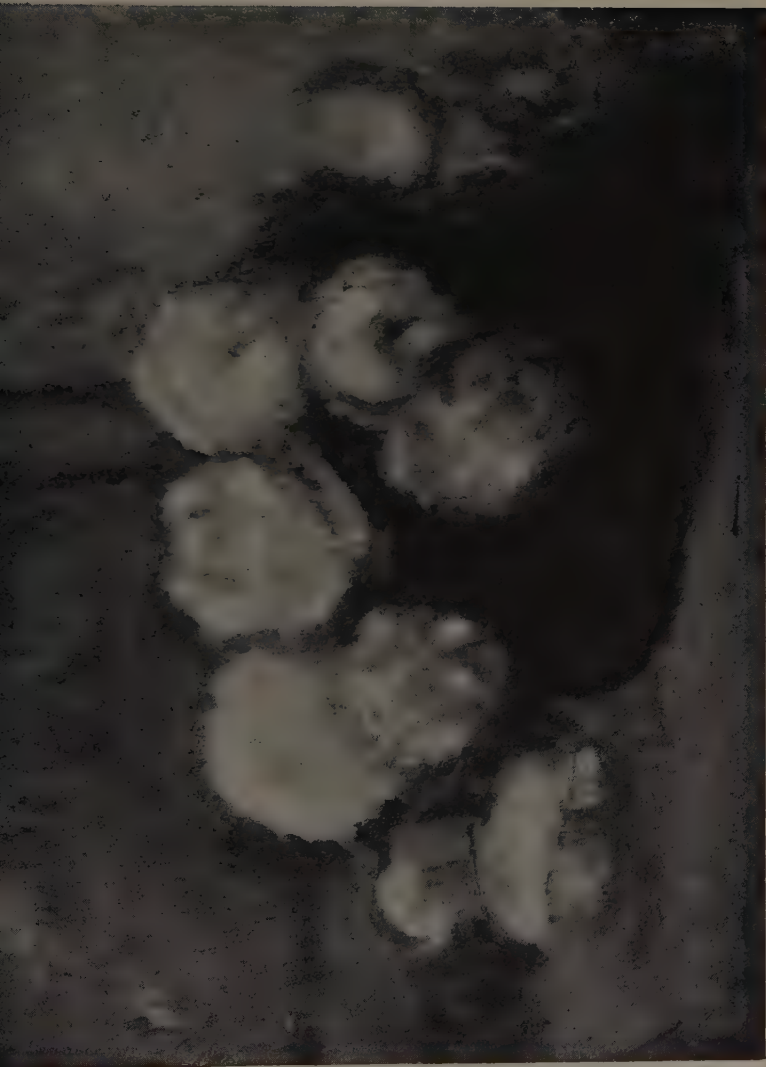
HANDS AND CAT by William Coldstream  
(Victor Pasmore collection)



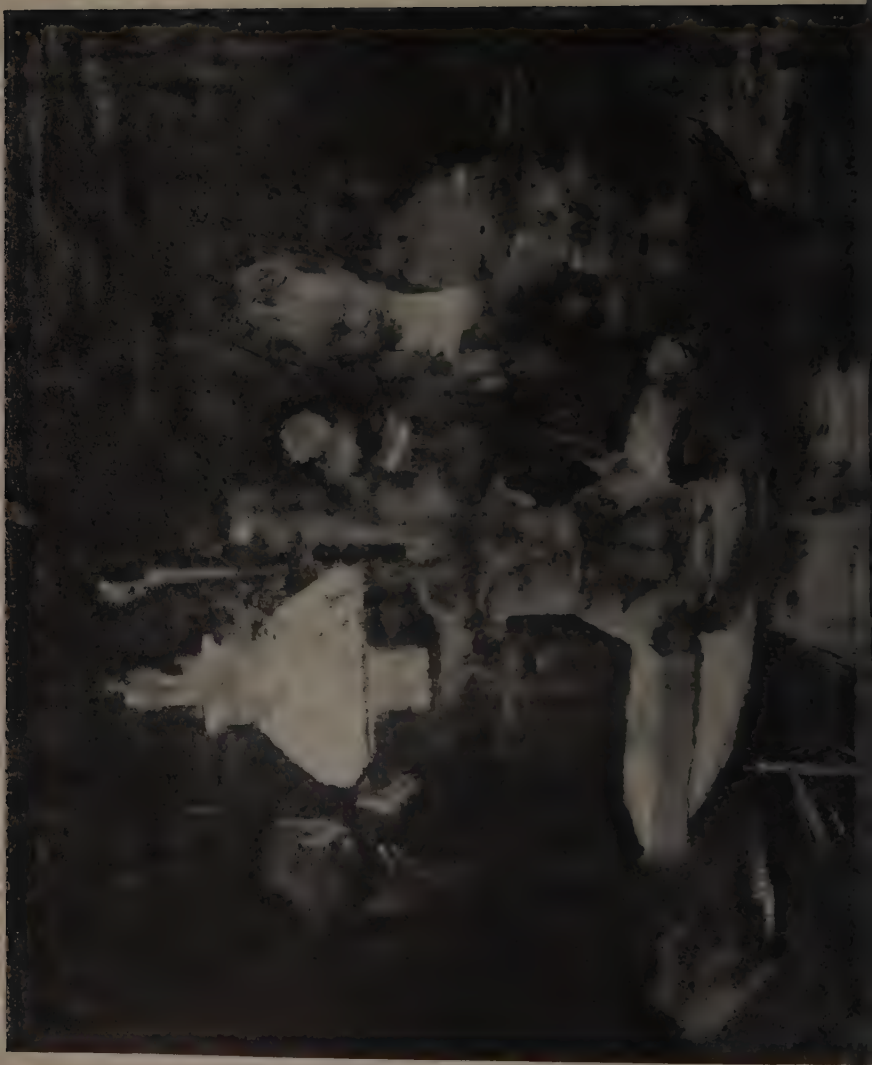
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WOMAN WITH SHAWL by Claude Rogers  
(Noel Blakiston collection)





PEONIES by Graham Bell  
(Victor Pasmore collection)





FOUR PHOTOGRAPHS by Cecil Beaton  
*from History under Fire the forthcoming publication by Messrs. Batsford*









these *pueblos* villages than towns, as does Hemingway.) Both the provinces are a part of Old Castile.

The men from those Castilian mountain villages are dour and hard, poor and distrustful. They have grown up on a soil which the snow covers half of the year and the sun scorches the other half. They are walled up in their own narrow lives, each working hard on his meagre bit of land and hunting the wild animals in the mountains. Their fierce self-defence against the hardships of their existence and of the very climate makes them shut the doors of their community against any stranger, beyond a momentary and generous hospitality. They do not allow the gipsies to stay overnight in their villages, but often chase them away with stones. They have come to hate their *señores*—all those who exploit them through money, position or power—and when they feel deceived by the highest power, their God, they turn against him with the same ferocious resentment. They do not talk much, nor do they talk easily; their turns of speech are heavy, simple and direct, with the dignity of simplicity and of pride in their manly strength.

I think Hemingway has seen all that and striven to express it. Some of his *guerrilleros*, above all Old Anselmo and El Sordo, belong to this soil. Yet he does not know the foundations of their lives and minds. Indeed, how could he? This is a Spain he has seen but never lived. And thus he commits the fatal error of putting the men of a Sierra village under the leadership of two people from the Spain he knows thoroughly, from the world of the *toreros* and their hangers-on: Pilar, the old gipsy tart, and Pablo, the horse-dealer of the bull-ring.

Such a situation is utterly impossible. The men from a township in the Sierra of Avila—from a place as primitive as Hemingway himself paints it—could never have admitted and accepted a Pilar and a Pablo as their leaders. The gipsy and the gipsified horse-dealer might have lived, and even become local leaders, in one of those villages in the Sierra de Guadarrama which Hemingway knows and which live on tourists and weekenders from Madrid; but then again, these villages could never have produced Hemingway's peasant *guerrilleros*. That is to say, the old gipsy whore from Andalusia with her lover, the horse-dealer, grouped together with peasants from Old Castile constitute a glaring incongruity.

This lack of realism is, however, necessary for the pattern of

Hemingway's book. It permits him to introduce, through Pilar's admirable descriptions of the people of the bull-ring a quarter of a century ago. It also permits him to construct scenes of savage brutality built round Pablo, whose whole mind is drenched with the smell of the Plaza de Toros and who is capable of studied deliberate cruelty. The scenes of the book which seem to have impressed themselves deeply on the minds of every non-Spanish reader as being barbarously realistic and true are thus the result of a purely artificial choice of *dramatis personæ*.

When Hemingway decided not to describe a group of pure Castilian guerilla fighters led by the most brutal and brave man among them, but to introduce the colourful gipsy woman and the bull-ring assassin, he blocked his own way to the reality of the Spanish War and Spanish violence.

Pilar relates in a painfully vivid narration what happened in this small Sierra township after the outbreak of the Rebellion. First she describes the assault on the barracks of the Guardia Civil, and this part of the tale is perfect in its realism. Just so it happened in many places throughout Spain. Then she tells how Pablo (who, as we must again emphasize, could never have become a leader in such a village in real life) organizes a monstrous and elaborate lynching of the local 'fascists', with the underlying intention of involving the whole population in the same blood guilt. He organizes the lynching like one of the old village bull-baitings or *capeas*. The men are in the square, most of them in their festive clothes, and with their wine-skins and armed with flails, sticks and knives. The doors of the Town Hall open to let out the prisoners one by one; they have to pass through the narrow space between a double line of men until they reach the edge of a cliff. The men in the lines, drunk with wine and cruelty, beat and knife their enemies to death, jeering at them the while. The bodies are thrown over the precipice. The women look on from the balconies, and in the end they are shamefully drunk with blood and bestiality, just like the men.

Now, it happened in countless small towns and villages that the underfed peasants and labourers killed the local *señores* who had starved them for years and sneered at them: 'Let the Republic feed you!' At first, there was almost everywhere some man or other, more savage than the rest, who wanted to lynch the 'fascists' and shouted: 'Let's tear their guts out!'—guts being a euphemism for which Hemingway uses the crude Spanish word



in italics. Then two or three of the most hated men would be killed in the streets, brutally, in an outbreak of blind fury; but there was no deliberate torture. The others were shot at night on the threshing floors in the open fields where the women could not see it, nor even hear the shots. They were killed and then they were buried. Often those who had killed in revenge were naïve enough to give their victims a burial in the cemetery so that they should rest 'in hallowed ground'.

Hemingway must have sensed this. He had to invent his Pablo, the crafty, potential murderer, accustomed to seeing horses slit open in the bull-ring, in order to stage-manage this collective blood-orgy. Yet even if a Pablo could possibly have organized such a lynching, it is unthinkable that the community of a Castilian village would have followed him to the end of the revolting butchery, and not sooner have lynched Pablo himself. It is even more unthinkable that the butcher could have remained the leader of honest men who became guerilla fighters because of their own convictions.

The brutal violence of Spaniards, which exists together with a dark acceptance of life and death, is always individual. It draws strength and pride from a very simple awareness of their own masculinity. In the explosion of that stored-up violence people would agree to kill their enemies, to kill them quickly with a straight bullet or a straight knife, without investigation or trial. Nobody, except of course the few with diseased brains who must have existed, thought, or could have thought, of organizing slaughter like a *fiesta* and of putting on festive clothes to get drunk on blood. In those village bull-baitings which Hemingway describes through the day-dreaming of his young guerrillero Andrés, the people would finish up intoxicated with mass cruelty; yet there is still a profound difference. Even if those *capeas* were nothing other than collective killings, the killing was not that of a tame cow but of a wild bull. Brutal, yes; but demanding personal bravery and the risk to life and limb from every individual. Thousands of young men have died in *capeas*. But if a milch cow had been put in the middle of the village square, nobody would have touched her, because a thing like that *no tiene gracia*, it would have held no attraction. The *gracia* does not consist in killing the bull, but in knowing that he can kill you. Everything else would destroy your claim to manliness.

Hemingway has forgotten this when he describes the collective killing of defenceless enemies in a bull-ring atmosphere. And yet this is the kind of violence which the common reader would be apt to expect from Spaniards; the supreme skill of the narrator makes it seem stark reality. To me, this is the worst aspect of Hemingway's fundamental mistake: he falsifies most plausible the causes and the actual form of the tragic violence of my people—not knowing that he falsifies it, because much of what he describes does exist in the Spain of the bull-ring, the Spain he understands and seeks to find in every Spaniard.

The chain of errors prolongs itself, always springing from the same main source. Hemingway balances this story of a Republican atrocity by equally realistic-sounding and equally false stories of fascist atrocities. Again, the most important incident is one of collective violence. The heroine, Maria, has been violated by a group of fascists and she tells her lover about it.

At the beginning of the Civil War, Franco's Moorish soldiers committed rape. I myself knew of concrete cases. Afterward the Spanish fascist officers did their best to put an end to these outrages, although they themselves went on committing other forms of brutality inherent in civil war and fascist mentality. I have never heard of a collective violation by Falangists, and I do not believe it ever happened. Such a thing is contrary to Spanish psychology. I want to make it quite clear that I do not deny the potential and actual bestiality of Spaniards, but I do deny the psychological possibility of a collective sexual act. The consciousness of his own virility would make it impossible for a Spaniard to want the union of his body with that of a woman still warm and moist from another male. He would loathe it physically. Again, Hemingway describes most vividly what is intrinsically wrong; again, he is wrong because he fails to understand the individual quality of Spanish violence. Since these are the crucial parts of his psychological pattern, his whole picture of the Spaniards at war is distorted and unreal.

There is, however, another group scene which is magnificent in psychology and detail. The *guerrilleros* feel that Pablo is about to turn traitor, and try to provoke him to a step which would justify killing him. Although they believe his death to be necessary for their common good, they do not attack him together and finish him off, which would be easy; they stage a discussion which

proceeds from insult to insult, true to life in its ceremonial violence, and try to incite Pablo to challenge one of them. That one would then be ready to kill him face to face. He would be ready to stab the bull—if the bull accepts the fight.

There are other Spanish scenes and characters which are excellently observed. The old Anselmo, with his grave problems of life and death, is completely genuine. The fascist officers are real, although their actions are artificially constructed. Everything connected with the world of the bull-fight is vivid and essentially truthful. El Sordo, the peasant leader of another guerilla band operating near Pablo's, is as much in the right place as Pablo is in the wrong. As far as he is described in his brief appearances, he is typical of his kind: primitive, harsh, straight, and ingenuous, continuing to live and fight though he knows that the future holds no hope. In the end he dies with a simple, brutal and unsentimental dignity: he dies, killing.

But even the genuine characters are curiously detached from their background. One never quite knows why they fight for the Republic, one only feels their stoic loyalty. There is no growth and no future in them. And yet it had been precisely their hope and belief in a constructive future which had set the Spanish labourers and peasants in motion.

Less relevant for Hemingway's treatment of the Spanish War, but interesting in view of his conception of the Spanish character, is the fact that the love story between the young American, Robert Jordan, and Maria is pure romancing, at least in so far as the Spanish girl is concerned. I cannot judge—for I cannot feel and associate in English—whether the love scenes are convincing. They may be good writing, though they do not seem so to me. They are certainly unrealistic in their psychology of the female partner.

A Spanish girl of the rural middle class is steeped in a tradition in which influences from the Moorish harem and the Catholic convent mix. She could not ask a stranger, a foreigner, to let her come into his bed the very first night after they had met. This, however, is what Maria does. She could not do it and keep the respectful adoration of the members of her guerilla group who know the history of her violation. They would call her a bitch on heat, not because she sleeps with a foreigner, but because she offers herself to him at once without even having been asked by him.

Maria's ignorance of kissing and love is another impossible fiction. Such mental innocence may be found in other layers of Spanish society, among girls who had no other contact with life but their Father Confessor and the Holy Sisters of their convent school. In this, the most unreal character of the book, there is also particularly marked discrepancy between social background and excessively lyrical language. This belongs, however, to the general question of the language used by the Spaniards throughout the book.

It is here that the artificiality of Hemingway's Spain and the gaps in his actual knowledge of the Spanish mind show themselves most clearly. The Castilian peasants speak forcefully and simply. Their language can be austere, it can express a sombre kind of hilarity. They often cover their resistance to expressing their own more complicated emotions by fierce blasphemy. All this has been said often, and Hemingway knows it. But when it comes to rendering the dignity and sobriety of their speech, he invents an artificial and pompous English which contains many un-English words and constructions, most of which cannot even be admitted as literal translations of the original Spanish. To prove this would require much space and would sound merely pedantic, but I want to give an example:

Agustin says: 'Also I have a boredom in these mountains.' (Hemingway-Jordan had commented on the fact that Spanish peasants use the abstract word *aburrimiento*, boredom; in reality, they hardly ever use it.) In such a case, the Castilian peasant would quite simply say: '*Además me aburro en estas montañas,*' or '*Estas montañas me aburren,*' of which the English equivalents are: 'Also I'm bored in these mountains,' or 'These mountains bore me.'

The curious translation, which is no real translation, wants to impress on the reader the abstract quality of the peasant's speech. Yet it is precisely characteristic of the Castilian of the people that it shuns abstract nouns and rather expresses the abstract idea as personified concrete action such as 'the mountains bore me'. Hemingway continually sins against this spirit of the language in both the choice of words and the structure of the phrases in his dialogues between Spaniards. It seems to me that poise and simplicity of language should be rendered by equally poised, simple and natural language. The quality of dignity must flow out of directness, not out of hollow and artificial solemnity. I resent



Spaniards in a serious book speaking like Don Adriano de Armado, the 'fantastical Spaniard' of 'Love's Labour's Lost'. As a writer, I would be unhappy if Spanish dialogue I had written were to be translated into something as affected and artificial as: 'I encounter it to be perfectly normal,' when all I have said in Spanish was: *Lo encuentro perfectamente normal*—'I find it perfectly normal'; or into: 'You have terminated already?', when I have said: *Habeis terminado ya?*—'Have you finished already?'

Now, this matter of the treatment of idiomatic speech in a translation is most difficult, in any language. Yet Hemingway's solution, which sounds like utter realism, is in point of fact the very contrary. It makes the understanding of shades almost impossible to any reader who does not know Spanish, and it removes the Castilian figures to a plane of unreality where strange phrases and strange psychology run riot. The fact that genuine Spanish swear-words and idioms are copiously scattered all over the pages only adds to this unreality.

The erroneous use of blasphemy and obscene language reveals very neatly how Hemingway has failed to grasp certain subtleties of Spanish language and psychology. Instead of a long list I will give two instances, among the most striking in the book:

Robert Jordan continuously addresses Maria as 'Rabbit', in both English and Spanish, in intimacy and in public. Now, the Spanish word happens to be one of the more frequent and vulgar euphemisms for the female sexual organ. Jordan is described as knowing all the intricacies of Spanish double meanings. Had he really addressed his girl like this in public, it would have provoked a truly Rabelaisian outburst.

The other instance derives from a deeper misunderstanding.

One of the *guerrilleros* asks Robert about Maria: 'How is she in bed?' Another, who himself loves Maria and explains to Robert that she is no whore because she slept with him, says: 'And thy care is to *joder* with her all night?'

It is strictly impossible for a Spaniard to ask another man how his wife or lover is 'in bed'. It would break a taboo which is only lifted in the case of prostitutes. No Spaniard would use the word *joder*: the ugliest verb for the sexual act, and one which expresses not the joy but the nausea of sexual union, about a woman he respects and whom the other man loves. It would inevitably provoke a fight. But Hemingway-Jordan discusses the matter

serenely, Jordan unaware that he has lost face by accepting an insult, Hemingway unaware that the use of the word by Agustín and its acceptance by Jordan gives away the fact that his own real knowledge of Spaniards is still confined to the world of 'Death in the Afternoon'.

\*   \*   \*   \*   \*

When Hemingway came to Madrid in early Spring 1937, he came with the apprehensions of a man who had been hurt and twisted by the Great War, and who was now voluntarily exposing himself to bombs and shells, afraid of being afraid once more and eager to share the experience of a people's struggle. He came with the apprehensions of a man who, many years before, had found an escape from his inner helplessness in the animal brutality of the world of the Spanish bull-ring, after having been scarred by the disciplined and dull violence of modern war, and who now was afraid of having lost the Spain he knew and loved.

I remember him vividly now, as I knew him in those months big and lumbering, with the look of a worried boy on his round face, diffident and yet consciously using his diffidence as an attraction, a good fellow to drink with, fond of dirty jokes 'pour épater l'Espagnol', questioning, sceptical and intelligent in his curiosity, skilfully stressing his political ignorance, easy and friendly, yet remote and somewhat sad.

I think he had once taken Spain, the Spain of toreros, wealthy young *señoritos*, gipsies, tarts, tipsters and so on, rather as one takes drugs. This colourful and purposeless game with life and death which followed rigid and ancient rules must have responded to some inner need of his. He wrote what to my knowledge is the best book on the bull-ring, *Death in the Afternoon*. When he came back to Spain into our war, tired of describing and observing the flabby violence of American gangsterdom, he found few traces of the world he knew. The great toreros with whom he had been friends were on the side of the fascists. The gipsies had lost their market and had disappeared, many of them to the trenches.

Hemingway mixed with the soldiers in the bars more than with the pretentious Left-Wing intellectuals. He made many friends as one makes friends drinking and joking together. Yet he lived the somewhat unreal life of a war correspondent in the shell-pitted Hotel Florida, among foreign journalists, officers of the International Brigades on leave, and a motley crowd of tourists and

tarts. He could speak well with Spaniards, but he never shared their lives, neither in Madrid, nor in the trenches. The commander of the International Brigades, a man who appeared to us Spaniards the epitome of ugly prussianism, explained to him the strategic and tactical details of the battle of Madrid and the battle of Guadalajara. Kolzoff, the correspondent of *Pravda*, gave him his cynical but shrewd explanations of life behind the scenes. Hemingway had access to the strictly guarded world of the Hotel Gaylord and he came to know its inmates, the Russians and the International Communist functionaries. And he admired them, secretly sceptical, and yet with a naïve longing to share their facility of decision. He must have had a bad conscience because he could not become part of the Spanish fight, nor part of that other political fight which seemed so clear-cut to those Russians and Communists.

In *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, there is the sublimation of all these experiences. The world of the Hotel Gaylord is evoked with an astonishing accuracy of detail; the non-Spanish figures of the book are all life-like portraits, some under their real names, such as the disastrous André Marty; others, like Kolzoff, slightly idealized and thinly disguised. What Hemingway did not do, but would have liked to be capable of doing, and what he actually felt is mirrored in his hero, Robert Jordan, who is left dying at the end of the book, not so much because the inner necessity of the tale demands it, as because Ernest Hemingway could not really believe in his future.

And then there is Spain. Hemingway could describe with truthfulness and art what he had seen from without, but he wanted to describe more. He wished for a share in the Spanish struggle. Not sharing the beliefs, the life and the suffering of the Spaniards, he could only shape them in his imagination after the image of the Spain he knew. His old obsession with violence pushed him into a track which only led him still further away from a share in that new and still chaotic Spanish life.

Thus the inner failure of Hemingway's novel—its failure to render the reality of the Spanish War in imaginative writing—seems to me to be due to the fact that he was always a spectator who wanted to be an actor, and who wanted to write as if he had been an actor. Yet it is not enough to look on: to write truthfully you must live, and you must feel what you are living.

# MICHAEL ROBERTS

## THE LESSON OF FRANCE<sup>1</sup>

'Culture and literature, M. Maurois, are all very well, but culture without strength soon ceases to be a living culture.' We can put the case for culture and literature with rather more warmth than Mr. Churchill permitted himself, and yet still accept the proviso. A flower is a nobler thing than a handful of inorganic earth—we can look on it as a proper end and justification of inorganic matter—and a peaceful and civilized nation is nobler than a tribe of scowling warriors, but if a flower, a nation or a culture loses the capacity to turn brute matter to its own ends it ceases to exist. M. Maurois refused in 1935 to take Mr. Churchill's advice and write one article a day to point out that the French air force was no longer the best in the world and that the German was in process of becoming the best in the world. To-day he sees the force of Mr. Churchill's contention, and he has written a far better record of the last days of the Third Republic than one might have expected from a writer who has often seemed to be flashy rather than brilliant, and whose books have been more often sparkling and piquant than illuminating or profound.

Those who read the extracts that were published in the *Daily Telegraph* will be relieved to know that the book contains something more than a record of intrigues, conspiracies and back-biting. The *Telegraph* could not resist the gamey bits; but the lunch-table gossip and the anecdotes about so-and-so's mistress occupy only a small part of this admirably concise record. M. Maurois recognizes that the failures and foibles of individuals do not explain the collapse of a nation. They were the cracks and weaknesses in the dike through which the flood came, but were not the flood itself nor yet its cause. 'The part played by personalities was not the essential cause of defeat. That cause . . . was lack of preparation, military, diplomatic and industrial on the part of the Allies.' And on another page M. Maurois insists: 'To-day we can say that the war was lost, so far as France was concerned, at the very moment it was begun. It was lost because we did not have enough aeroplanes, or enough tanks, or enough anti-aircraft

<sup>1</sup> *Why France Fell*. By André Maurois. Lane 5s.



guns, and because we did not have enough factories to build what we lacked. It was lost because our Ally had only a tiny army and did not possess the means of expansion which would have permitted her to take quick advantage of her immense reserves of men and riches.'

But there were other contributing factors. In a country in which for five or six generations political quarrels have always been more bitter than in England, it was easy for rival groups to accuse one another of being war-mongers, profiteers, traitors, dupes of the British. 'I shall disintegrate their war,' said Hitler, and the eight months of comparative inactivity suited his purpose to perfection. The factories did not work at full pressure, the Communists had time to change direction, and petty grievances had time to dwarf the major issues. When the attack came, there was still timidity and vacillation in the ministries and in the field. The French army, organized, equipped and trained for static defence, was thrown forward into Belgium, outmanœuvred, outflanked, and crushed. 'You can form no idea of the torrent of fire and steel that will descend on you,' said Count Volpi to Pierre Lyautey.) The British were driven from the field, and when on June 11th M. Maurois broadcast his pathetic appeal for help the British were able to offer only one fully equipped division and 'several squadrons' of planes.

M. Maurois laments these weaknesses, but he does not explain them. We can perhaps understand them better if we bear in mind a few material facts. In 1914 the population of France was over 40 million. In 1939, in spite of the addition of Alsace and Lorraine, it was still only 41 million, of whom more than three million were foreigners with no special loyalty to their adopted country. In 1840, the French population was greater than that of Germany, Italy or Britain. In 1940 it was less than any of them. The French national income had reached a maximum in 1909 or 1910 and had thereafter remained practically stationary while other countries advanced by something like 25 per cent. The productivity per worker was lower than in Britain or Germany, and under the Front Populaire régime it fell by 15 per cent. Facts of this kind make themselves felt even when they are not clearly recognized. It was not surprising that the Baudouins, Laval and Bonnets looked on the British alliance with misgiving. France, as a declining nation, would necessarily be the junior

partner in any alliance; and there was much to be said for avoiding war by joining Germany—who loudly proclaimed that she was strong, virile and ambitious—rather than Britain, who suffered from the same disabilities as France, though to a less extent. Once the war was started (and, according to M. Maurois, the French Government, helped by the Italians, had done its best to wriggle out) there was still the hope of a compromise peace. Even the muddle of defensive and offensive strategy had its roots in these weaknesses. 'France is a nation with a low birth-rate,' said General Gamelin, 'and it sustained frightful losses in the last war. It would not have the strength to survive another blockading war. The war she has to fight must be a scientific war in which everything is so precisely foreseen that the losses will be almost nothing.' Franco-British weakness had compelled Belgium, in 1936, to withdraw from the alliance, so that there was no agreed fortification of the frontier against Germany. France could not move before the German attack for fear of turning the Belgian army against her, and when the attack came she had to advance willy-nilly, against a bigger, better-trained and better-equipped force.

It is useless to put all the blame on the generals and the statesmen, the civil servants and the industrialists. France, like Britain, was a democracy, and furthermore a democracy in which the statesmen had formed the habit of consulting public opinion rather than guiding it. In Britain, in the years before the war, it was only the well-to-do Conservatives, like Churchill, Eden and Duff Cooper, who could afford to jeopardize their careers by pointing to the coming dangers and announcing the price that would have to be paid to avoid them. France had fewer men who shared that tradition of public service and whose fortunes were independent of the vagaries of public sentiment. ('England is a democracy because she is an aristocracy,' said Ernest Barker in a lecture at the Sorbonne.) The majority of people in England, and an even greater majority in France, welcomed the capitulation at Munich; and long after German re-armament was obvious they were still living in a world of muddle-headed make-believe. 'I hope you are for the League of Nations and no foreign entanglements.'

<sup>1</sup> The one thing that made compromise impossible, and overcame the pacifism of Chamberlain and Bonnet, was the plain fact that Hitler's war was not worth twopence.

said one of Harold Nicolson's constituents, and people who had been most persistent in their demand for British disarmament were loudest in their cries for Oil Sanctions against Italy, for intervention in Spain, and for no surrender at Munich. They meant well, but their conception of a better world was not the same as that of many Germans, Spaniards and Italians, and they mistook their own self-conscious virtue and generous indignation for political omniscience. The ignorant optimism of the Left, no less than the inertia and selfishness of the Right, helped to betray France and did its best to betray Britain. The belief that self-righteousness could triumph without the help of force, that the standard of living could be raised by legislative measures, that a nation could remain healthy while basing its morality solely on individual or communal greed, and that it was the function of the statesman to obey, not to enlighten—all these reinforced the effect of the declining birth-rates of the democratic powers.

To-day those doctrines no longer pass unquestioned among people who consider themselves enlightened and progressive. Perhaps the most important part of M. Maurois' book is its final chapter, where he records a conversation with N—— A—— (surely Sir N—— A——?) on the way to America. 'If we go to the bottom of the problem,' says N—— A——, 'the real struggle going on at this moment is not between two forms of government—democracy and dictatorship—but between two philosophies. . . . To-day, those who despise man are in the ascendant. Will it be a permanent triumph? I don't think so. Nothing is permanent in human affairs. Thesis, antithesis, synthesis, Hegel was right about it. *Thesis of the Eighteenth Century*: man is born good; the voice of the people is the voice of God. *Antithesis of the Twentieth Century*: man is a despicable monster who must be controlled by force; the people must listen to the voice of their master. The Synthesis will come: Christianity has already made it. The doctrine of original sin and redemption was a moral synthesis. And what will our political synthesis be? Approximately this: man was originally a cruel animal that has been gradually civilized by human and divine laws; he gained his liberties through work and discipline; he can only preserve them through work and discipline; democracies in order to survive must remember the virtues by which they came into being.'

One can argue about points of detail, but the gist of the matter



is there. How soon will people realize it? Pétain has told the French some home-truths, and they seem disposed to listen. There is no 'mysticism' about his belief and Weygand's that France must be redeemed through suffering. It is a matter of common experience that most people do not give up illusory and flattering doctrines until they hit their nose on a brick wall. Meanwhile we in Britain are committed to the struggle against Hitler, who stands for the pessimistic and Hobbesian 'antithesis'. We need the discipline of suffering less than France, because we are less deeply committed to a facile optimism. Perhaps we can make the synthesis without waiting for disaster. We have done it before, and at any rate we can try.

## SELECTED NOTICE

*Friends of a Lifetime*, edited by Viola Meynell. Jonathan Cape, 1940. On one of those miraculous days which accompany the beginning of wars I watched, through French windows, an elderly gentleman in a soft straw hat walk along the borders. We had become to tea with a good and successful poet; a silver kettle twinkled in the sun; the spaces of a wide cool house were filled with conversation; the war had been halted by park walls and lodge-keeper. The khaki of my new uniform, among those familiar summer colours, seemed to hedge even more than usual.

And this single meeting, I can see, was perfectly adjusted. Sir Sydney Cockerell, whose letter-books have now been edited by Viola Meynell. A man of good and successful friends, graceful tastes, communicable enthusiasms, neighbourly judgment. But his editor does not deal in personalities. The central figure is left, in almost silent discretion, walking along the borders, lingering at most to name, in an undertone, one of the eminent guests to a newcomer. 'You can say you have seen Lady Gregory; one can catch him murmuring. 'Yes, and Swinburne, too.' As a bevy of others, some of whom, it must be said, have little beyond their name to contribute to the party. Yet those who are susceptible to the nostalgia of summer and cucumber-sandwich and peace will enjoy even the suspicion of lion-hunting which,



this garden-party atmosphere, becomes a kind of substitute for lawn tennis. Besides, the suspicion may be unjust, for Sir Sydney's modest personal contribution, joined to the fact that, of sixty-two correspondents, fifty-five are older, and often a generation older, than himself, places him unavoidably in the position of a lifelong literary fag. Whereas, in fact, his own interventions clearly deserve more light than they are given. His handling of the row about the Doves Press and its type alone shows that he can make up his own mind and speak it; hence it is the more a pity that he has chosen to be edited out of a fair share in general correspondence.

The lions of the book have to make the running: Ruskin at their head, Wilfred Blunt and Thomas Hardy in the centre, and T. E. Lawrence at the end. Ruskin is Sir Sydney's touchstone. He has to be the English Goethe; Sir Sydney, who gives away more of himself in this section than elsewhere, an adolescent Eckermann. Their relationship provides the best evocation in the book of a different past; for the seriousness of Sir Sydney's approach to greatness fell out of fashion in the next generation. Ruskin is, to him, a conchologist, a Gothicism, a law-giver, only secondarily a Person. Before distinguished old men in our own time, the balance has been tilted the other way; and it may one day be counted among the marks of a generation in which sexual idiosyncrasy has so often had to make do for originality that the positions in an intellectual friendship of this kind are commonly reversed. Instead of the adolescent assuming the gravity of the elder man, we have been watching our elders climb down into the easy ways of the young. By the end of the book, T. E. Lawrence is already being fearfully young at forty, the age at which, for some reason, promise becomes a public virtue.

The Hardy letters are among the most interesting; in particular, the letters from Mrs. Hardy add warmth to the superficial picture of their life together. They are vivid and unpretentious, quite unlike the glum pebbly prose in which she has officially accounted for Hardy's later years. Pleasure of a different kind is given by this kind of thing, written in 1916: 'Yesterday my husband paid a visit to the Commandant of the Prison Camp here who took him to see the German prisoners. T.H.'s kind heart melted at the sight of the wounded . . . and now he is sending them some of his books in German.

'I wanted him to get some of the prisoners here to cut down a

few trees. But we are waiting until the Kaiser's head forester has got over an operation for appendicitis.'

The reactions of these eminent people to the last war show what in the light of history is an encouraging or occasionally comical anxiety.

*W. R. Lethaby* (1857-1931): 'I hardly see how I can stand the strain of this.'

*Hardy*: ' . . . the imbecility of our Ministers . . . the treachery of sections of the Press. . . '

'It looks to me as if everything were tending to an indecisive issue of the war, Germany preponderating.'

*Ricketts*: 'Santa Sophia will be blown up. . . . I should like to retire to Samoa.'

*William de Morgan*: 'Kultur has stopped me.'

*Blunt*: 'When the quarrel first broke out between the Empire I could not help feeling a certain elation at the thought that white civilisation was at last going to cut its own white throat which has so long wanted cutting. But I hoped we English should allow it to do so without taking part in the process personally.'

Blunt's tenant, Philip Webb, comes out of this collection as an exceptional letter-writer. It might have been better had the editor included more of his letters, and more of Ouida's, in place of dull letters from, for example, Lords Knutsford, Ferrers and Crawford. In Miss French's study of Ouida there are extracts from further letters to Sir Sydney which are as pointful as any of these, though without the spontaneous upper-cut of her comment on his engagement: 'Your life seemed to me so perfect as it was; and the *mieux est l'ennemi du bien*.'

Yet this perfection went on. Untouched by the rudeness of events, Sir Sydney has apparently managed to keep the fastidious order of his youth intact. Not preciously, however. The ivory tower is not an appropriate metaphor for this kind of busy aloofness. The tower, for it exists, is a good middle-class tower, polychrome brick, well-warmed and unfashionable. Unlike ivory it stands up to bombs.

ALAN PRYCE-JONES